



Poetics of the Incarnation

*Middle
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Writing and
the Leap
of
Love*

Cristina Maria Cervone

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Middle English Writing and the Leap of Love

Cristina Maria Cervone

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for my parents,
who first taught me what love is, and encouraged me to leap

*

set me as a seal upon your heart
as a seal upon your arm
for love is strong as death

*

ecce in manibus meis descripsi te

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Introduction

et Verbum caro factum est et habitavit in nobis.

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.

—John 1:14

THE GOSPEL OF John's description of the Incarnation—of God taking on human form—proposes not only a conceptual conundrum (in the well-known words of Luke's Gospel [1:34], "how shall this be done?") but also a language-focused one: "The Word was made flesh" sounds like a metaphor that links God and humanity by figurative signification of the word "word," yet in Catholic tradition, John 1:14 is not to be understood as metaphorical. Moreover, John 1:14 immediately raises an important interpretative question: what is the relationship of the Logos (here, "*Verbum*" or "the Word") to language? While this phrasing puts a focus on language and its sometimes challenging signification, the conceptual difficulties raised by John 1:14 are not themselves a result of phrasing. The mystery of the Incarnation has sparked the interest of writers since the time of Christ. Some of them, like those who are the subject of this study, have elected to think through their puzzlement over the "how" of the Incarnation in poetical or rhetorical forms rather than, for example, theological or philosophical treatises.

As is well known, the latter half of the fourteenth century saw Passion devotion increasingly spurring people's desire for intense affective and personal identification with Christ's suffering. At the same time, however, certain writers were engaged in less emotional, more intellectual investigations of Christ's humanity, investigations that intriguingly focus on the language through which writers speak their thought and on the written form such thought takes. Among them were individuals as widely recognized by medievalists today as William Langland, Julian of Norwich, and Walter Hilton, and as obscure as the unknown authors of the Charters of Christ and of a few lyric poems with botanical imagery. Such writers turned to the hypostatic union—the conjoining of divinity and humanity in the person of Jesus Christ—as a lens through which to examine the nature

of God and, conversely, to explore God's relationship to humanity. In their mode of thought, the Second Person of the Trinity becoming incarnate is of special interest as God's active, willed enabling of salvation: an overflowing of his love. In William Langland's memorable image, God's love eagerly leaps from heaven into the "earth" of the Virgin in bountiful zeal:

For the ~~high~~holigost heuene shal tocleue
And loue shal lepe out aftur into þis lowe erthe
And clennesses shal cach hit and clerkes shollen hit fynde:
*Pastores loquebantur ad inuicem &c. (14.84–86a)*¹

purity/virginity; catch

Langland's source for such emanative imagery, the topos of the "leaps of Christ," portrays events of Christ's life as a series of ardent leaps, wherein the Incarnation is the first eager leap that sets the rest of salvation history into motion. In the dreamscape of Langland's narrative, love's leap enacts the Incarnation even as it epitomizes its mystery in evocative, lyrical metaphor, within the imaginative faculty of the mind.²

The Incarnation itself is not, for the most part, these writers' main topic. Nevertheless, they repeatedly reveal their interest in how God intentionally expresses his very substance in unstinting generosity. Their considerations of the "how" of Incarnational emanation come to be deeply centered in the material imagery by which they articulate their thought, in the structural forms that give their writing shape, even in their ideas about language itself. Provocatively, their writing both engages and generates a mode of thought grounded in a working-through of philosophical and theological implications of language. It does so at a point in history when vernacular English was emerging as a legitimate, if contested, medium for theological expression. This book examines medieval linguistic explorations that have ambitious claims to make, then, and that do so in aesthetic terms as well as intellectual ones.

While the importance of the Incarnation in late medieval English writing is often acknowledged by scholars, the extent of its influence has not yet been considered.³ This book begins to fill that gap by sketching the outlines of a sophisticated area of late medieval thought that has been too little studied, and by pondering ways in which aspects of what today are diverse disciplines (literary studies, theology, philosophy, linguistics, cognitive science) meet in the mode of understanding these medieval writers seek to achieve. From short lyrics to complex narratives, the works I bring together here were composed in England during the second half of the fourteenth century. They are the relatively brief poems "Mary the Rose-Bush," "The Four Leaves of the Truelove" (or "The Quatrefoil of Love," hereafter

“Truelove”), the Vernon refrain lyric “Maiden Mary and her Fleur-de-llys” (hereafter “Flourdelys”), and the A-text of the “Long Charter of Christ”; longer works in verse and prose, the C-text of William Langland’s *Piers Plowman*, Julian of Norwich’s *A Revelation of Love*,⁴ and Walter Hilton’s *Scale of Perfection*; and a topos in the visual arts, the lily crucifixion. This visual trope occurs only in England and Wales from the mid-fourteenth through the early sixteenth centuries, suggesting that in late medieval England, Incarnational investigations were not limited to written works.

An Incarnational poetic, this book argues, epitomizes a way in which writers sought to understand the relationship of God to humanity by encoding the concept of the Incarnation within linguistic and rhetorical forms that point to Christian truths. Such poetics not only touch on philosophical and theological topics, as they assuredly do, but also are deeply invested, at a foundational level, in Christian theologies of the Incarnation of Christ. Nevertheless, and perhaps surprisingly, these writers do not turn to established modes of philosophical or theological investigation, modes with traditions, a history, (Latin) vocabulary, and means of expression all their own. Instead, their thought experiments are grounded in strategies of the sort studied by literary scholars, strategies best elucidated by close readings of texts. To come to an understanding of these strategies at work, this book, too, is engaged in close readings of texts, sometimes minutely so, scrutinizing even what may seem minor variants that track or suggest the progress of thought over time, because it is in the particularity of such details that foundational aspects of larger conceptual leaps may be discerned. The details make the bigger picture stand out with a clarity our initial, intuitive grasp may only partially apprehend.

Not an organized movement or specific school, nor even a single mode adhered to by its proponents, this flourishing of Incarnational thought was simultaneously articulated in independent but related ways. With regard to the Incarnation, the writers I have singled out do not demonstrably draw on or respond to the thought of one another, although in some instances they might have known each other’s work (Hilton and Julian, for instance). Their work is aimed at diverse audiences, not at a single or unified group. Because they speak only infrequently about their methods and seldom didactically about their message, their thought must be inferred from the form that both encodes it and reveals its essence. As Nicolette Zeeman has recently argued, such structural theory remains theory even when its mode of expression is indirect:

the full extent of literary self-theorization—whether Latin or vernacular—only becomes apparent when we recognize that much of it is expressed in figured and even metaphorical

As Zeeman points out, “imaginative” or “literary” theorization is not only understudied but generally overlooked in favor of the more directly treatise-like scholastic texts, even though the “other speaking” quality of “imaginative theory” is implicitly acknowledged and authorized by those very texts.⁶

By an Incarnational poetic I mean a particular type of a structural frame within a work, as well as a kind of writing that advances for both writers and readers a way of endeavoring to know by means of that structural form. An Incarnational poetic repeatedly returns to theological issues raised by the hypostatic union, most particularly the implications of Christ’s humanity, and does so in “figurative” language, with conspicuous attention to the “other-speaking” quality of imagistic expression. The term *poetics* has broadened so much in scope in the wake of poststructural theory that it has become something of a catch-all. It frequently denotes a literary system, although not necessarily one in verse; that is the sense I intend here. By “structural frame” or “form” I do not wish to imply didacticism or stasis—some mode of thought worked out in advance and then applied rigorously and deliberately throughout a work; rather, my focus is on process, on a thoroughgoing, organic, and flexible mode of thought that pursues comprehension over time, evolving as it matures. I want to emphasize the *systemic* (existing throughout), not *systematic* (inflexible), implications of the term. In the examples I advance in this book, the actual structure itself differs from work to work but the fact that there is such a structure—a pervasive underlying form informed by the theological and linguistic implications of “the Word made flesh”—is common to all. Medieval writers found in their diverse Incarnational thought experiments a way of seeking a way of knowing, if I might put it in such a roundabout fashion, and roundabout is an appropriate notion here, in that the work of an Incarnational poetic has a circling or spiral feel. Meaning does not transcend or supplant the form through which it is expressed, but abides within poetic and linguistic form even as it exists ideationally and abstractly in a “hypostatic union” of linguistic form and metaphorical thought. Here the specificity of words—their very quiddity—thickens abstraction. Surprising junctures of the material intangibly confect the immaterial, deliberately calling attention to language’s capacity to express more than it says, and to do so in pleasurable ways. These works entice readers to notice, ruminate over, delight in, and wonder at the capaciousness of metaphor, at how a figure may express more than the sum of its parts. While the specifics differ, in each case theology (even if expressed impressionistically) is

tiated to poetics, with form and language receiving special attention.

One characteristic aspect of these works is the recurrent strategy of reifying Christ's body at moments when writers have every reason to focus on that body's humanness—often its fleshly vulnerability (the suffering, crucified body). Each of the works that are the subject of this study draws two, and occasionally three, particular image groups into conjunction with one another in strikingly inventive and illuminating ways: Christ's body as *book, text, or language*; as *cloth, clothing, or enwrapment*; and as *plant, growth, or life force*. Moreover, each of the three image groups comprises an array of reifications from the firmly concrete to the highly abstract, as my triple descriptions suggest ("book" being the most concrete and "language" the most abstract of the first image group's range, for example). Writers momentarily reverse "the Word made flesh" to render Christ's body in figure as something other than a human body, such as a plant, for instance, or words on a page. The fleeting, transitory nature of the reversal calls attention to the cognitive shift involved in understanding the metaphor. In wrestling with the problem of ineffability, medieval writers paradoxically engage a sort of *supereffability*, which I define as an understanding of sacred fullness enacted through form. A scriptural model for such supereffability may be found precisely in that Johannine expression of metaphor-that-is-more-than-metaphor, "the Word made flesh."

The interest of these fourteenth-century writers is not in enfleshment as such, then, so much as it is in the hypostatic union, the point of connection between the human and the divine.⁷ For them, the hypostatic union points up the human need for mediation with God; they perceive Christ as a mediator in whom humanity and divinity are conjoined. He is the "mene," as Julian of Norwich calls him (56.15): the intermediary, the mid-point, the means, and the way, with several theological concepts of note here conjoined in the Middle English word *mene* in a way that no single-word Present Day English translation can match.⁸ It is worth noting that while these writers desire to make sense of the divine nature in part by investigating what it means to be human, their mode of thought actively engages both sides of the union, not just the human side, as affective poetry tends to do. For them, thinking about embodied experience correlates with contemplating unembodied divinity. By portraying Christ in figure as something without a human body—the true-love plant, for instance, or a charter—medieval writers deliberate over Christ's humanity in a way that draws attention to the *paradox* underlying the connection between God and man, while de-emphasizing Christ's bodily suffering at the Passion.⁹ Their focus is not primarily on the "flesh" side of the metaphor; rather, they work from the middle term—the verb—that

yokes language's active fluidity to both the divine and the human.

It is no coincidence, then, that these writers incline toward thought experiments that portray emanative activity or organic growth rather than stasis or passivity. Their strategies for puzzling over the Incarnation encourage readings based in rhetorical or poetic schemes but more often in tropes such as metaphor, reification, personification, and the near-personification I will call *linguistic dilation*, which is a momentary stretching out (*dilatatio*) of language such that words nearly take on agency as they fleetingly almost act within their localized context.¹⁰ Such imagining complements the activity, as these writers see it, of the Incarnation—the willed, kenotic leaping of love—so that if we hear only “static” in “hypostatic,” we have missed their point, theologically, linguistically, and even poetically, because the two-way pull of Incarnational thought is expressed by means of form.¹¹ In the ways they engage tropes, the thought experiments of such writers invite interrogation of the nature of language itself, but especially of *figurative* language, and of how such language may carry social or cultural significance.¹² The trope of personification, for instance, suggests a focus on the nature of personhood: setting aside theological precision for a moment to think in literary critical terms, the Incarnation could be envisioned as the epitome of personification, as God's personification of his language of love, Jesus as the person of the Trinity whose bodily presence materially expresses and performs that love and that language.

Embodiment and personhood together form a natural locus of attention for an Incarnational poetic, because from early Christianity, personal and community identity were linked through the Incarnational notion, found in Paul's epistles, of the Church as the body of Christ, wherein Christ is envisioned as the head and individual Christians as the members of the body.¹³ For fourteenth-century writers, notions of lordship were also important. Implicit in the Pauline model are two socially significant aspects of embodiment: the nature of personhood itself and membership in a (corporate) community. The Pauline analogy is grounded in the *gestalt* of embodied experience: a wholeness (body) is distinct from its individualized parts (head, foot, hand, etc.) but cannot exist without those parts.¹⁴ The Pauline body links distinctions of persons (each individual within the corporate body) with communal or corporate identity (one collective body made up of multiple individual members).¹⁵ In taking on humanity, Christ through the Incarnation is incorporated into the community of Christians as the head of a body of followers. Drawing on the Pauline model, late fourteenth-century Incarnational investigations consider social responsibilities and hierarchies, often by recourse to language of lordship or ideas about

the nature of the Church.

The thoroughgoing systemic of a gestalt similarly pervades an Incarnational poetic. In poetical writing, through their use of literary forms, medieval writers think deeply about the nature of language, of the vernacular, of humanity, society, God, comprehension—all this in ways that suggest these topics are fundamentally interconnected, not discrete. In this book, then, I wish to discuss a vernacular poetics of metaphor triggered by the issue of Incarnation; for brevity's sake, Incarnational poetics.

* * *

A broad range of philosophical, theological, linguistic, and literary issues would be raised by the sort of writing I have described, regardless of historical or cultural circumstances. The theological potential of tropes was not newly discovered in the fourteenth century, for example. Writing in the first decade of the third century, Tertullian pointedly made the case that the hypostatic union was not metaphorical in nature: “For it was not figuratively [*non figurate*] that the Virgin conceived in her womb; and not by a metaphor [*non figurate*] that she gave birth to Emmanuel, God with us, Christ Jesus.”¹⁶ Like Tertullian, fourteenth-century writers recognized that the Logos is substantive, not linguistic.¹⁷ While God can speak the Logos, people cannot. Furthermore, how can one even speak *about* what one can neither say nor quite understand? Human language is time-bound and contingent; God's speech is capacious and efficacious. Given the problem of ineffability, what is a writer interested in comprehending the Incarnation to do?

The works I bring together here, however, are of consequence not just because they engage timeless theological and philosophical issues, as they assuredly do. Their historical moment renders them of special note: they were written at a time in English history when the status of the vernacular in theological discourse was in question. The point is demonstrated well by a few lines from the *Life of St. Katherine*, written by John Capgrave, an Augustinian canon, in the middle part of the fifteenth century, when strictures against both preaching and instruction on religious matters had narrowed some of the poetical options available to his near-contemporaries, Langland, Julian, Hilton, and the others. Much scholarly work on this time period, particularly in literary studies, has focused on Archbishop Arundel's Constitutions of 1409, legislation that was aimed at countering Lollardy and other forms of heresy. In his important *Speculum* article that sparked ongoing scholarly debate over the concept of “vernacular theology,” Nicholas Watson argued that the Constitutions was “one of the most draconian pieces of censorship in English history, going far beyond its

ostensible aim of destroying the Lollard heresy and effectively attempting to curtail all sorts of theological thinking and writing in the vernacular that did not belong within the pragmatic bounds set by earlier legislation like Pecham's Syllabus of 1281."¹⁸ While, as Watson acknowledged, A. I. Doyle and Bernard McGinn both spoke about "vernacular theology" before he himself did, it was Watson's article that became a recurring touchstone in critical debate, and his further work on the topic ensured that his argument became the defining vision against which other scholars have situated their own thought.¹⁹ The volume of *English Language Notes* edited by Bruce Holsinger in 2006 (44.1) gathered a group of succinct papers that looked backward to Watson's original sharply focused thesis, which excluded preaching texts and drama, for instance. At the same time, these articles looked forward to expanding critical uses to which "vernacular theology" was being put. In his own contribution to *ELN*, Watson slightly adjusted his view of the shift that he had previously argued occurred in religious writing in the vernacular after implementation of the legislation. He nevertheless reiterated two points he found more relevant than ever: "that writing about religion in the vernacular is a political act (in a more specific sense than that in which writing in general is political); and that, because this is so, all vernacular writing about religion is *connected*, part of a single field or arena of discourse."²⁰ The first of those points is particularly important to understanding Capgrave; the second is equally true of my notion of Incarnational poetics, wherein authors writing for varied audiences in diverse genres, some in verse and some in prose, and not specifically influencing one another, are nevertheless connected in their manner of working. In a companion article in *ELN*, David Benson suggests that "treating Langland as a theologian risks undervaluing him as a poet" and that "we should pay more (or at least equal) attention to the poetic form in which these opinions are expressed," a caution much in sympathy with my project.²¹ Even more than the writers I consider in this study, because of his historical moment Capgrave had to be especially careful about what he said and how he said it; they, on the other hand, were opening up possibilities for vernacular discourse even as the moment rapidly approached when an important segment of that discourse would be vastly complicated or, possibly, shut down.²²

Capgrave articulates with dry humor some of the aims of his fourteenth-century predecessors, aims to which he evidently aspires but ones that had been rendered problematic by Arundel's edict. At the moment when the divinely inspired Katherine must expound on the doctrine of the Incarnation to the assembled scholars in Parliament, he ruefully notes:

It is ful hard swech thingis forto ryme,
 To uttir pleynly in langage of oure nacion,
 Swech straunge doutes that long to the Incarnacion.²³

difficult/foreign questions

By “langage of oure nacion,” Capgrave specifies the vernacular in which he writes, English, as opposed to the aristocratic vernacular of the court (French) or the learned language of theologians (Latin). Through this wry aside, he identifies a triple difficulty in his poetic task: the conceptual challenge of working through a theology of the Incarnation (a timeless problem), the linguistic problem of expressing abstract thought in material terms (also timeless), and the potential social or political ramifications of disputing complex theological issues in the vernacular (an issue contemporary to him). While Capgrave himself was an Augustinian canon, Arundel’s Constitutions prohibited debate over theological matters even among clerics, except at universities.²⁴ Beyond the ordinary conceptual problems associated with “such difficult questions [*straunge doutes*] as pertain to the Incarnation,” Middle English was “plain” in another, more prosaic way: it lacked the clarity of Latin technical vocabulary. Further, writing theology in the vernacular could lead to potentially deadly charges of heresy, or even sedition. So the problem of writing about the Incarnation, as Capgrave saw it, was evidently both diachronic and synchronic, in part a conceptual one that had engaged others throughout Christian history and in part tied to strictures situated in his time. Capgrave’s “most ambitious use of the vernacular to convey religious information,” as Karen Winstead has called it, was ambitious in more than one way.²⁵

At first glance, it would seem that Capgrave’s primary purpose here is to cagily evade the restrictions on vernacular writing on doctrinal issues by acknowledging the difficulty inherent to translation. The problem of translation was specifically mentioned in the Constitutions as one of the reasons for Arundel’s restraints; perhaps Capgrave hoped that his comment about the vernacular would make him appear sympathetic to the legislation. Even more interestingly, however, Capgrave suggests one particular way in which linguistic utterance might express more than it says directly. He wants to be able to “uttir” Katherine’s theological arguments not only clearly but also fully, a concept he links both to versification and to the Incarnation. In Middle English, a “pleyn” utterance is a full utterance, an utterance pregnant with meaning, whose plenitude (from the same Latin root) is replete with abundance.²⁶ In the context of the Incarnation, this capacity of language to be full, to suffuse, evokes emanation, a flowing forth from God—even specifically the generation of the (uncreated) Son from the Father. Capgrave deliberately touches

on a sensitive area of doctrine—the Incarnation—by choosing this moment in the narrative to call attention to Katherine’s (and his) use of the vernacular.²⁷ Faced with the ineffable, Capgrave turns to the supereffable: a “full word,” “pleyn” vernacular English verse.

By indicating that he will supplement his source for Katherine’s *vita* by “enforc[ing]” (supporting) it with others “whēch spoke more pregnantly as in this matere” (4.2199–200), Capgrave calls attention to the doubled nature of “pleyn,” and it is this doubled nature that provides an important connection to the work of his predecessors. The reference to pregnancy is partly playful, since the topic at hand is “His conception” (4.2202). However, he also pairs pregnancy deliberately with the notion that vernacular English could be unclear (whether ambiguous or indecipherable). Although he does not say so directly, he implies that he is thinking of dialect. Supplemental accounts of Katherine’s theological argument are necessary, he says, because he can scarcely understand his vernacular source—a source whose vernacularity he stresses.²⁸ He has previously noted the strain he experiences when reading his source’s English, which he describes as “his derk langage” (Prol.62). Because his source did not speak pregnantly enough, Capgrave did not understand fully, or so he says:

It is ful hard swech thingis forto ryme,
To uttir pleynly in langage of oure nacion,
Swech straunge doutes that long to the Incarnacion.
But that myn auctour toke swech thing on hand,
And yete his langage unneth I undirstande,
Wherfor with othir auctouris I enforce him thus,
Whēch spoke more pregnantly as in this matere,
For ageyn the byrth of oure Lorde Jesus
And His conception argued thoo this sere: . . . (4.2194–202)

author
scarcely
reinforce/support

anticipating
then; prophet

The difficulty he has in reading the “derk” vernacular prompts him “To translate this story and set it more pleyne” (Prol.233). Indeed, he not only writes it out in his own up-to-date English (implying that “more pleyne” means “clearly”) but also in verse; moreover, he composes in a conspicuously ambitious verse form, rime royal, and at considerable length (implying that “more pleyne” means “fully”)—his version of the *vita* comprises a prologue and five books of no fewer than 8,624 lines, an effort comparable to Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*. The desire “to uttir pleynly” replicates, in its dual meanings of clarity and plenitude, language’s capacity for fullness that offers the opportunity to move beyond inexpressibility. That Capgrave specifies he will seek such fullness in verse implies that, as he sees it, *form* might offer an enhanced means of expressing what perhaps could not otherwise be said. In brief, he argues for “imaginative theory” of precisely the sort Zeeman urges us to notice, and he does so by means

of poetic form.

While Capgrave does not go on to write in the form of an Incarnational poetic (the quoted moment in the text is not part of a systemic form that yokes poetics to theology by thinking through the hypostatic union repeatedly, over time), his dilemma over language and poetic structure in theological discourse epitomizes the interest in poetic and linguistic form demonstrated by his English predecessors. When they turn to the Incarnation as a means of understanding Christ's humanity, they similarly rely on the notion that meaning may be borne by formal features of the writing, that "to uttir pleynly" about the Incarnation might require verse, or metaphor, or some other form of patterning. While patterning is obviously an important feature of literature more generally, especially of poetry, the form-based paradox of "the Word made flesh" is accentuated by how an Incarnational poetic plays out through the structural framework of a given work: in repetition that introduces variation. Once a pattern is established, readers expect some link among its elements, some common foundation, and authors build on such expectations. Patterns, and their fulfillments, and their alterations are there for alert readers to find. In that process, it helps to know that a pattern, or a form, is being sought. The layering of reified variations that subtly structures an Incarnational poetic parallels the cognitive response, over time, of a reader who might think "the Word made flesh" must be a metaphor for God's presence but then adjusts that understanding to think simultaneously of the historical Jesus as a man dwelling among humankind and as Logos. In every way imaginable, the phrase "the Word made flesh" resists simplistic interpretation. This thinking through of "what could *that* mean?" is deliberately encoded in "the Word made flesh," this form in which John's Gospel presents the Second Person of the Trinity, the historical Jesus, God among men, the Logos—whatever term a reader substitutes for the puzzling phrase. As these writers engage it, language's potential for what I have called the supereffable, in its intellectually challenging fullness, may offer a means toward approaching the ineffable.

* * *

Like Capgrave, I am intrigued by both diachronic and synchronic aspects of Incarnational poetics. Incarnational poetics, as I have outlined it, ties in with issues of urgent contemporary interest in medieval studies and in literary studies more broadly. The religious turn in literary studies, and even in contemporary thought beyond the academy, has called attention to spirituality in a way that gives historical religious thought more relevance than ever. Yet, more could be done to encourage scholars of vernacular religious thought away

from taxonomies that tend to fossilize our thinking about medieval writing. Terms such as “mysticism” (must Hilton always be paired with Julian or the Cloud-author?) and even “vernacular theology,” so provocative when newly introduced, risk becoming a form of shorthand that reduces the vibrant and sometimes mystifying complexity of medieval religious texts, making them more manageable, if ultimately less intriguing. The *ELN* issue I noted earlier and the *After Arundel* volume both revisited the topic of “vernacular theology” to investigate what sort of work remains to be done, and where current thinking about “vernacular theology” may be falling short.²⁹ As Benson noted with respect to *Piers Plowman*, oftentimes we lose sight of the poet in tracing the theology.³⁰ What is the place of poetry and poetics within the study of religious thought? The works that are the focus of my study in this book repeatedly call attention to the fact that form matters, not just theologically but poetically, and sometimes theologically *because* poetically.

With the rise of the “new formalism,” poetic form is receiving more attention than ever. One difference between the argument of this book and many new formalist investigations is that in medieval studies, the focus has generally been on secular texts, with a few exceptions.³¹ I noted earlier that in my view, close reading is especially useful when we look for what that “other speaking” of “figurative” language might say, that reading with careful attention to minute details can help us to figure out how that “other” sense happens. However, two panels on close reading organized by Christopher Cannon for the New Chaucer Society’s meeting in New York City in 2006, which were extremely well attended, brought out an intense disagreement over the merits of close reading in literary scholarship. From that discussion, it emerged that while most people in the room agreed that it is valuable to teach close reading to students, not everyone felt a need for close reading in literary scholarship. To call the debate lively would be an understatement; depth of feeling on both sides was palpable.³² In an essay on form from about the same time, Cannon himself advocated a broader than usual definition of literary form, one that would require careful scrutiny of more than the typical details:

the form of a text not only consists of all the structural levels we traditionally anatomize when we refer to “literary form” (as we look, almost always by turns, at its metre, rhyme scheme, or style; at its metaphors or patterns of imagery; at its generic affiliations or plot), but of the integration of all those levels, along with any other aspect of a particular text which may be seen to structure it. In assuming that every attribute of text is either the elaboration or entailment of some originating “thought,” this method necessarily recruits a very great part of that structure to any account of a text’s meaning.³³

Like Zeeman, Cannon notes that in “discussions of form in the Middle

Ages (if not in all periods) . . . governing theories are more usually *embedded* than stated.”³⁴ Maura Nolan similarly calls for “severe scrutiny” of texts, to move beyond readings that “fail to read the text closely enough” and therefore produce a plausible, yet ultimately shortsighted, view. Speaking of some lines from Chaucer’s portrait of Alisoun in the *Miller’s Tale*, Nolan suggests that the closest of close readings offer “an appreciation for the degree to which [the portrait] produces and then sustains an aesthetic tension between the natural and the artificial as a way of preserving its own vision of the beautiful.”³⁵ Such pleas for intensive scrutiny of textual details in the service of understanding larger issues of form are well worth heeding, in my view, and my own project takes a similar stance.

Yet beyond topics of interest in literary and medieval studies, questions raised by how these writers treat the Incarnation at this point in time intriguingly align with more than one issue inherent to writing (on any topic at any time) in a formalized and structured mode, issues such as when, why, and how poets offer a concrete metaphorical image in place of naming an abstract concept, for instance. They are matters of import to modern writers or readers of poetry—even to users of language more generally. To give one brief example, consider the title of a key early symposium for metaphor studies, “Metaphor: the Conceptual Leap,” which punningly expands the sort of link Capgrave drew between pregnancy and language’s capacity to signify, but in a secular context. Sheldon Sacks explains the play on words by quoting the neo-Kantian philosopher Ernst Cassirer:

“But if this is indeed the case—if metaphor, taken in this general sense, is not just a certain development of speech, but must be regarded as one of its essential conditions—then any effort to understand its function leads us back, once more, to the fundamental form of verbal *conceiving*” (Ernst Cassirer, *Language and Myth*).

Cassirer’s sense that metaphor leads us back “to the fundamental form of verbal *conceiving*” is reflected in the continuing life of the essays in this volume.³⁶

As Sacks sees it, metaphor is essential to expression of thought, and the begetting of thought generates further thought as readers “conceive” it: thought takes on a “life” of its own as essays are bound together in a volume and sent forth into the world. Sacks was certainly right about “the continuing life of the essays”: the collection was an early bellwether in the burgeoning field of metaphor studies and has continued to sound a strong guiding note as the field is grazed and flourishes.

Was my playful evocation of a sheep’s bell sounding the way in the midst of thriving vegetation a constituent part of my point about metaphor or mere ornamentation to add to the pleasure (one can

hope) of reading my words? Such questions are well worth considering, and tie in with the long-contested issue of whether metaphor and other “figurative” language is fundamental to thought, as Augustine came close to suggesting, or an ornamental add-on to language, as Aristotle claimed. It is important to note, too, that once one focuses on the slipperiness of signification, it is hard not to be hyperaware of the polysemous potential implicit in the words one chooses (was “whether” itself a sound pun, when I drew attention to the bellwether of my sheep example?). “Conceive” illustrates the dangers and benefits of such sensitivity particularly well: what does “conceive” offer that “grasp,” “strive for,” or “think of” do not? Now that I have drawn your attention to it, will you hear resonances of “the Word” in “conception,” “conceit,” and “conceive” when used in the context of thought, even outside the bounds of this discourse? What concord in the shared root word enables the permutations of “inform,” “conform,” “formulate”? There is an inherent figurative nature to all language. That metaphoricity can take different forms and stress different associations at various cultural moments. In late medieval England, religious poets and thinkers embraced metaphor for its theological, philosophical, and poetical potential. The sort of writing that considers the implications of “the Word made flesh” has a heightened capacity to make meaning from polysemy, and the fourteenth-century writers I discuss here were, for this and other reasons, strongly interested in the superabundance of sense latent in language. It is therefore especially useful to be attuned to the particulars of how they draw language and theology together—useful for understanding both their cultural moment and ours, and for thinking through problems surrounding the status of metaphor, the nature of which is a highly contested area of study today in several academic disciplines. While the argument of this book is itself fundamentally both literary and historical, its overtones resonate with larger questions about the nature of perception and expression.

As will become apparent, this study is ultimately more interested in qualities medieval works share than where they differ. While there is important work to be done on distinctions among the thoughts of these writers, that is not the focus of this book. Rather, I want to sketch the outlines of a questing sort of thought, a thought that seeks to understand rather than one that gives a static, didactic answer. In these works, the activity of that seeking parallels the activity of love’s kenotic leap, although unlike the Incarnation itself, the seeking these writers do never fully realizes its potential. The working-through of thought is central to the mode of understanding in an Incarnational poetic; time, and the development of thought over time, are therefore also key concerns. Perhaps most prominent in this body of work,

however, are the gestures that both defer and bring to the fore in the same move. Incarnational thought suffuses a work in a backgrounding sort of way that stands out when you know to look for it. This suffusion is a crucial part of what makes an Incarnational poetic so effective. The principle applies in the reifications of Christ's body, where the cognitive shift to a metaphor makes the nature of Christ as God and man together both the main focus and also the background. It applies, too, in Capgrave's strategy of speaking about something other than, and in addition to, what he said.

These issues have given shape to my own thought about the medieval texts I discuss. For that reason, this book follows an issue-oriented structure, with chapters that explore abstract theoretical concepts rather than historical topics. These issues are interrelated, not discrete; they are facets of a larger whole, not separate modes of thought or hermeneutics. They offer different vantage points from which to consider what writers are doing when they engage evocative imagery, such as love's leap. Chapter 1 addresses how language signifies, taking up the challenge offered both by medieval writers' understanding of sensory perception as a model for linguistic signification and the body-centered focus of present-day cognitive linguists; here I address implications of considering figurative language to be conceptual rather than linguistic in nature. Augustine's use of the trope he calls "enigma" stands as a useful headnote for the issues at stake in this chapter. Like fourteenth-century writers influenced by his thought, he treats abstract ideas through bodily and linguistic reference points, where language and form are key, and he locates the core of truth in God's language of love as expressed in and through the Incarnation. For Chapter 2, I move to the interplay between abstract and concrete. In the "Long Charter of Christ" and other poems, the plant enigmatically known in medieval England as the true-love, sometimes used as a sort of shorthand for Christ himself, Christ's body, or salvation, usefully highlights how these authors routinely compress the concrete and the abstract, a compression central to the paradox of *not* perceiving "the Word made Flesh" as metaphorical. Key imagery here includes other plants with established religious symbolism, such as the lily and the rose; clothing-based topoi, such as bodily wounds as a *côte armure* or livery; and document-focused tropes, the body as charter or Eucharist as indenture. Chapter 3 addresses the elision of actor and act inherent, for instance, to the conceit of the Incarnation as "love deed," simultaneously an act and a deed of gift, which in the "Long Charter of Christ" coincide in the body of Christ written on and written out as a land grant, spoken by Christ in the flesh. Because such elision of actor and act also highlights the hypostatic union of God and man in the person of

Christ, I turn to the linguistic concept of deixis (proximity to or distance from the speaker, as encoded in linguistic expression, such as “I,” “here,” “now,” or “you,” “there,” “then”) to elucidate power relationships that touch on lordship and kingship in this and other poems. Building on the interplay of abstract and concrete from Chapter 2, here language takes on the ability to act, “the Word” dwelling among humankind. Actor and act coincide in the capacity of “the Word” to enact power, where bodily form (or lack thereof) is often of as much interest as is linguistic form. A major topic for this chapter is the topos of the leaps of Christ, centering on Langland’s use of the leaps for his image of love’s leap, the source of this book’s title.

The deictic centering discussed in Chapter 3 leads naturally to the fourth chapter’s topic: intersections of historical and poetic time, drawing from the enigmatic property of the Incarnation as God’s physical entrance into human time, both a historical and a timeless moment. The paradox of the Incarnation as existing within time but outside of time is highlighted in Langland’s brilliantly puzzling description of the Incarnation coming as “*plenitudo temporis* time.” Borrowing from the visual arts the notion of simultaneous narration (multiple narrative moments depicted in one narrative plane), I build on the foundation laid by Chapter 3 to examine how an action does useful work when thought of as simultaneously historical and timeless. For these writers, the moment of the Incarnation becomes a lens through which to perceive other actions, both human and divine, even as it becomes a structural background for understanding. The lily crucifixion offers a parallel case from the visual arts. This trope makes use of simultaneous narration and offers a counterpoint, in a static image, for the teleology of narrative time, of progress in understanding in and through time. The fifth and final chapter takes on the largest-scale aspect of Incarnational poetics: the form-based systems through which late medieval writers approach God’s language of love. I borrow the term “deep structure” from transformational grammar to investigate how the layering of understandings over and through poetic time enables language’s capacity for fullness, through structural form. This “eddy back of sense” by means of deliberate repetition with variation is typical of poetry in general, of course. Here, though, poetic deep structure intensifies a way of knowing, a way of representing ineffability that becomes particularly helpful when considering the *form* in which God manifests his divinity to humanity. I offer readings of the Incarnational poetics of the “Long Charter of Christ,” *The Scale of Perfection*, “Truelove,” and “Flourdelys.”

Because deep structure is difficult to envision in the abstract, I advance a brief visual correlative by way of the lily crucifixion, a

topos that appears to have developed in the last half or quarter of the fourteenth century (see Figure 4 below, p. 199). Here Gabriel is on the left, Mary on the right, with a sort of potted-plant Jesus receding into the background between them. Just as art historians may use the terms “foreground” and “background” to clarify visual processing of an image, cognitive scientists also speak of a conceptual foreground/background dichotomy, where the subject of one’s attention in any cognitive framework—whether art object, literary work, or life situation—stands out to the perceiving subject as the salient “figure” against a less prominent “ground.” Only a shifting of context is required to reverse “figure” and “ground.” This shifting is fundamental to the visual trope of the lily crucifixion. Because the visual presentation of the scene sets the Annunciation in the foreground, it could be easy on quick glance to miss seeing the crucified Christ on that lily plant. The Christological context of salvation history suffuses the background, however, by way of the lily crucifixion, offering theologically meaningful resonance to that foregrounded action by situating the moment of Incarnation within the framework of Christ’s life as humanly begun, his human death, and his bodily resurrection (through the Easter connotation of the lily). Simultaneous narration of Incarnation, Crucifixion, and Resurrection encourages a Bonaventuran understanding of salvation: one event flows from another. Similarly, an Incarnational poetics suffuses a work by manifesting itself in underlying structures, grounding the work as a whole in Incarnation theology while not focusing attention directly or primarily on the Incarnation itself. The foreground/background focus shift encourages complex reading: if we focus on the Annunciation, we isolate one moment in time; if we focus on the lily crucifixion, we overlay three moments in time, and that overlaying offers a way to conceptualize God as existing simultaneously outside of time and within human history, and Christ as being fully human and fully divine. We can choose to switch between these modes of perception, a mental equivalent of the visual diagram in which one chooses to see either two human faces or a single vase.

This book, then, takes on modes of thought—both fourteenth-century and present-day—that jointly engage language, form, history, divinity, ineffability, and cognition. That shared focus mirrors the holistic sort of thinking to which late medieval writers were accustomed, where disciplinary conventions had not yet split philosophy from theology, and literary studies as such did not yet exist. The scope of Incarnational poetics in late medieval England would indeed seem to warrant Capgrave’s “straunge doutes.” For these writers, complexity, perhaps even multiplicity, offers an opportunity to take up the “fullness” latent in “pleynly” when one engages, in

linguistic form, a mystery that is—on the face of it—an enigma.

Chapter 1

The “Enigma” of Signification in “Figurative” Language

“Charite,” quod y tho, “þat is a thyng forsothe
That maistres commenden moche. Where may hit be yfounde?

.....

For thogh me souhte alle þe sektes of susturne and brethurne,

And fynde hym, but figuratyfly, a ferly me thynketh;

Hic in enigmat, tunc facie ad faciem.

And so y trowe treuly, by þat me telleth of charite.”

—William Langland, *Piers Plowman*,

16.286–97 ~ B 15.149–64

Whoever, then, can understand the word [uerbum], not only before it sounds, but even before the images of its sound are contemplated in thought—such a word belongs to no language, that is, to none of the so-called national languages, of which ours is Latin—whoever, I say, can understand this, can already see through this mirror and in this enigma [per *hoc speculum atque in hoc aenigmat*] some likeness of that Word of whom it was said: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God; and the Word was God.”

—Augustine, *De Trinitate*, 15.10.19

This is oo maner sight of Jhesu, as I seide bifore: not as he is, but clothed undir likenesse of werkis and of wordes, *per speculum in enigmat* (1 Cor. 13:12), bi a myrore and likenesse, as the apostil seith.

—Walter Hilton, *Scale of Perfection*, 2.43.3373–74

WHAT IS THE “mirror” through which, and “enigma” in which, the likeness of God may be glimpsed?¹ What mode of perception permits such a glimpse? For fourteenth-century writers, Christ’s joint divinity and humanity situates him ideally as mediator between God and mankind. As Julian of Norwich puts it, “be [by] the endles assent of the full accord of al the Trinite, the mid person would [*desires to*] be ground and hede [head] of this fair kinde [*human race*]” (53.34–36)² The very middle-ness of the hypostatic union serves to point in two directions at once: toward the likeness of God in humanity and towards a glimpse of God himself. To elucidate the paradox of how the divine and the human could meet in the hypostatic union, fourteenth-century writers turn, as Capgrave did after them, to a multilayered mode of thought. In their practice, a glimpse-enabling

mode of perception inevitably draws on, or even consists primarily of, what today we commonly term a “figurative” (opposed to “literal”) sense of language. While what fourteenth-century writers believed about the signifying properties of language, particularly figurative language, is worth examining more generally, their use of language is of special interest wherever they engage the conceptual challenge of the Incarnation. This chapter lays a foundation for the others by focusing on specific engagements with Middle English’s figurative potential, considered in light of Augustinian language theory, critical theories of metaphor, and present-day cognitive models for language processing.

To tease out some complications of “figurative” with respect to Incarnational thought, we might look closely at some intrinsic claims of “*per speculum in ænigmate*” By means of metaphor, this verse from Paul’s epistle asserts that people cannot perceive God directly in his essential nature. In 1 Cor. 13, “mirror” and “enigma” come as the culmination of a meditation on the nature of charity. Both the seeking and the finding of God’s likeness are associated here with human interrelationships in the context of Christian community: God is revealed through the charitable acts of a charitable person. 1 Cor. 13 thus plays on the perhaps counterintuitive notion that God may best be glimpsed within humanity. In Christian thought, the Pauline epistle’s glimpse of God is commonly associated with the incarnate Christ, because both 1 Cor. 13 and 1 John 4 offer teachings on charity, and the latter expressly links charity with the Incarnation.³ While nothing in 1 Cor. 13 indicates specifically that the mirror and the enigma have to do with figurative language, the writers of the epigraphs to this chapter compellingly link “*per speculum in ænigmate*” (“through a mirror in an enigma”) not just to the incarnate Christ, as we might expect, but also to language itself. Their interest is partly Christological and partly centered on language’s capacity to signify; in thought and in practice they engage the question of how human language can convey the ineffable. In this context, “*per speculum in ænigmate*” also suggests that figurative language could verge on saying what otherwise can neither be articulated fully in language nor, perhaps, comprehended in thought.

Like “*per speculum in ænigmate*,” “the Word made flesh” (John 1:14) stands as an intriguing case of language that aims to model a difficult, abstract concept. Beyond its theological claim about God’s relationship to humanity, its implicit claim about language is that as linguistic expression, metaphor comprises more than the sum of its parts, perhaps even more than a (probably longer) literal paraphrase. This view of the power of figurative language is shared by fourteenth-century writers. For them, metaphor, like other nonliteral language, is

not primarily ornamental but, rather, fundamental to a way of understanding, and they perceive language, embodiment, and cognition as mutually interrelated. As they consider the relationship between God and humanity, they demonstrate that they recognize perception as being based in bodily existence. Intriguingly, they also appear to believe cognition to be body-based. In this narrow respect, they align with the strand of cognitive linguistics that today identifies thought as fundamentally metaphorical by nature, and with a subset of that strand that considers cognition to be shaped by the nature and capacity of the bodily mechanisms (neurons, synapses, etc.) that enable thought.⁴ Both cognitive scientists and medieval writers share an interest in the relationship of cognition to embodiment, and both find solutions not grounded in Cartesian mind/body dualism.⁵ Metaphor studies today thus both speaks to and may benefit from considering the Incarnational thought and poetical strategies of fourteenth-century writers. Whereas the present-day theory of conceptual metaphor ends up virtually doing away with the literal/figurative divide, however, medieval writers make conspicuous use of the pointing and pointed referentiality such a dichotomy can reinforce, even where they frame the dichotomy in other terms, as “bodily” and “ghostly.” For them, the referential property of language — language’s capacity to say more, off the page—becomes very much the point.

In his important statement on allegoresis in *De Doctrina Christiana*, Augustine situates the pointing referentiality of language in the context of sign theory, whereby “a sign is a thing which, over and above the impression it makes on the senses, causes something else to come into the mind as a consequence of itself” (2.1.1).⁶ Such otherness, brought to mind in consequence of a prompt, might well describe what we perceive as “figural” about “figurative” language. Although Augustine wrote centuries before the writers who are the subject of this study, his thought resonates particularly strongly for the topic of Incarnational poetics, since he ties signification of this pointing kind explicitly to the incarnate Word in *De Trinitate* and elsewhere. Julian, Hilton, and Langland are commonly believed to have been influenced by Augustine, and the ultimate stage of Augustine’s thought on language and the Logos in *De Trinitate* intriguingly aligns with the thought process that underlies an Incarnational poetic, a point I shall elucidate in Chapter 5. Augustine’s sense of “enigma” as a special category of allegory, a view he states in *De Trinitate*, therefore stands as a useful shorthand for the main issue at stake in this chapter: how language conveys complex abstract thought, especially (but not exclusively) in metaphor. To understand the nature of the Trinity, Augustine links human language to the Word

of God. His technique, like the techniques of fourteenth-century writers, hinges on his ideas about how language signifies, so it is with his technique and his ideas that I begin.

Hilton's word "Jhesu" and Augustine's word "Word"

In his *De Trinitate* Augustine wants to explain the nature of the Trinity to the best of his abilities, given that it can neither be described fully nor comprehended directly in its essence. In the process, he uses the term "enigma" to link "the Word" to human cognition. As he works through his model of how the mind [mens] works, he advances human language as a useful analogy for understanding the Incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity. His treatise builds upon trinities he identifies in creation, the human body, and then the human mind, in order to explain the workings of the uncreated Holy Trinity. To make his analogy effective, Augustine needs to define terms in a technical way specific to his larger argument about the relationship between God and humanity. In the following two quotations, he generates a specialized sense of the word "word" (not yet of the word "Word," although he is working towards a link between "word" and "Word").⁷ In the portion of his argument that precedes the first quotation, he has already discussed how this "word" is not necessarily linguistic, although it may be, and not necessarily a thought expressed in language, although it may be.

Whoever, then, can understand the word [uerbum], not only before it sounds, but even before the images of its sound are contemplated in thought—such a word belongs to no language, that is, to none of the so-called national languages, of which ours is Latin—whoever, I say, can understand this, can already see through this mirror and in this enigma [*per hoc speculum atque in hoc aenigmate*] some likeness of that Word of whom it was said: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God; and the Word was God." (*De Trinitate* 15.10.19)

Here Augustine specifies that if expressed as language, the "word" does not necessarily belong to the language of the people; in his case, Latin.⁸ This "word," he tells us, is initially a *movement* within the mind towards comprehension, a movement then given *shape* when a person thinks, finally given a *form* discernible by bodily sense when a person speaks or gestures. He further explains by analogy how the Word of God took on human nature, assuming a form but not changing substance. This step, with its focus on form and substance, is crucial for the transition he wants to make from the vernacular (for Augustine, Latin) to the Logos:

Hence, the word which sounds without is a sign of the word that shines within, to which

the name “word” more properly belongs. For that which is produced by the mouth of the flesh is the sound of the word, and is itself also called “word,” because that inner word assumed it in order that it might appear outwardly. For just as our word in some way becomes a bodily sound by assuming that in which it may be manifested to the senses of men, so the Word of God was made flesh by assuming that in which He might also be manifested to the senses of men. And just as our word becomes a sound and is not changed into a sound, so the Word of God indeed becomes flesh, but far be it from us that it should be changed into flesh. For by assuming it, not by being consumed in it, this word of ours becomes a sound, and that Word became flesh. (15.11.20)

Theologically, the important point here is that the Word of God did not change substantially (in essence) in the hypostatic union. Augustine’s technique of defining “word” in a narrow sense is crucial, however, to maintaining the analogy. A “word,” in Augustine’s sense, must be unchangeable and must have existed before thought, just as Augustine believes the Second Person of the Trinity is unchangeable and uncreated, and has always existed.

Augustine goes on to say that when we seek a likeness by which to see “the Word of God” “through a mirror as in an enigma,” we should look to our internal word, not to the outer word manifested through the senses.⁹ He treats “mirror” and “enigma” as he does the word “word”; they carry technical senses related to the interpretation of figurative language. For Augustine, in Paul’s “we see now through a mirror in an enigma,” the word “mirror” cues an image or likeness to be interpreted, and “enigma” cues an intense cognitive puzzle.¹⁰

Using the concept of form imposed on a word when enunciated, Augustine highlights the distinction between creator and created, begotten and made, the true language spoken by God and human languages. While his point relies on the notion that some aspect of God’s truth is innate and resides within the mind, the way he chooses to put forward his analogy reveals something of his thought about the nature of language itself. His theoretical focus, the inability of human language to express the divine in plain speech, is demonstrated in practice as well: he needs a specialized sense of the word “word” in order to say what cannot be said directly about “the Word of God.” Only the reader who understands that the word “word” is supercharged with sense will be able to glean one sense from another, through a mirror, in a trope.

Each of the writers who are the primary subjects of my investigation similarly uses language on occasion in a technical and specialized way, sometimes drawing from a word’s polysemous nature, sometimes investing words, phrases, or images with context-specific meaning. This process is characteristic of most writing, of course, and in particular of poetry. Nevertheless, the concept of the Incarnation, having human form as an important focus, invites and even necessitates special formal awareness, of which this is one example. Insofar as Augustine capitalizes on both linguistic and

rhetoꝛical foꝛm to make his analogy, his strategy proved a usefuḷ model foꝛ lateꝛ wꝛiteꝛs inteꝛesteḷ in the Incarnation.

In Book I of *The Scale of Perfection*, foꝛ instance, Hilton chooses the woꝛd “Jhesu” instead of the woꝛd “woꝛd,” but foꝛ a similaꝛ purpose in that he wants to define the woꝛd “Jhesu” not in its oꝛdinaꝛy sense but in a way specific to the new devotion to the Holy Name, which he is promoting heꝛe.¹¹ Note that Hilton has imitateḷ Augustine’s technique and even some of his woꝛding, as he insists on what soꝛt of woꝛd he does *not* mean:

I schal telle oon [one] woꝛd foꝛ alle whiche thou schalt seke, desire, and fynde, foꝛ in that woꝛd is al that thou hast loste. This woꝛd is Jhesu. I mene not oonli this woꝛd Jhesu peynted upon the wal, oꝛ wꝛiten bi letres on the booke, oꝛ foꝛmed bi lippes in soun of the mouthe, oꝛ feyned in the herte bi treuile [work] of mynde; foꝛ on this maner wise may a man oute of chaꝛité fynde hym. But I mene Jhesu Crist, that blissid persoone, God and man, son of Marie, that glorious virgyne, that is al goodnesse, endelesse wisdom, love, and swettenesse, thi joie, thi woꝛschipe, and thyn ai [ever] lastynge blisse, thi God, thi Lord, and thy savacioun. (1.46.1314–21)

In his reiteꝛateḷ insisteḷce that he means *not* the woꝛd spelled out on a wall¹² oꝛ in a booke, *not* foꝛmed by the lips in soun of the mouthe, *not* fantasizeḷ inteꝛnally by the woꝛk of thought, Hilton reveals his indebtēdness to Augustine’s concept of the woꝛd behind the woꝛd.¹³ While Hilton’s ultimate tenoꝛ, like Augustine’s, is the Seconḷ Person incarnaḷe, Hilton is not so inteꝛesteḷ as Augustine was in investigateḷ the cognitive dimensions of language; rather, he wants to tie Augustinian language theory to a particulaꝛ and relatively new devotion (the Holy Name). Like Augustine, Hilton does want to differentiate between human language and the Logos. At the same time, he draws an analogy between the English woꝛd “Jhesu” and God’s language of love: the meditativeḷ practice of focusing on the Holy Name is intendeḷ to entice the devout into a moꝛe intimate relationship with God.

Just as Augustine haḷ, Hilton sets up this passage by situateḷ it in the context of the mirror and enigma of 1 Coꝛ. 13. However, the seꝛch foꝛ Jesus within the self comes within Hilton’s laꝛgeꝛ project to enable a devout individuaḷ “to recoꝛeꝛe agen his woꝛthyneḷse, and reforme in him the ymage of the Trinite” (1.45.1277–78). That link between “image” and “re-form” might in itself be enouȝ to evoke the concept of humanity being made in God’s likenesse (Gen. 5:1, the Old Testament passage to which 1 Coꝛ. 13 alludes). Hilton goes fuꝛtheꝛ, though, by asseꝛting that while no one may regain the state of innocence that the Fall of Adam and Eve destroyed foꝛeveꝛ, still, “though we myȝhten neꝛeꝛe geete it heꝛe fulli, yit we schulde desire that we myȝht recoꝛeꝛe heꝛe lyvand [*while living*] a figure and a likenesse of that dignité, that ouꝛe soule myȝht be refoꝛmed, as it were in a schadewe, bi grace to the ymage of the Trinite” (1.45.1283–86).

The reference to “figure” and “likeness” works like the “mirror” and “enigma” of 1 Cor. 13, here signaling a lived state that can be similar to but not fully the essence of a (now lost) state of innocence. “Shadow,” on the other hand, sets up a reference Hilton completes much later, in *Scale 2*, when he refers to the hypostatic union as a shadow; for Hilton, “shadow” is an Incarnational reference.¹⁴ So in Hilton’s view, the likeness of God lost in the Fall appears to be tantalizingly similar to the Incarnate Word, meditation on whom can enable the re-forming of the soul. Further, Hilton draws on the larger context of 1 Cor. 13 in a way Augustine does not, by noting that the manner of sight he advocates is tied to charity. The word painted on the wall, written in a book, formed by lips, thought in the heart—all these, he says, may be found by those who are “oute of charité.” While Hilton’s focus on reforming the self might seem to isolate devotion into a private exercise, his attention to the prevalent theme of 1 Cor. 13 (what charity is and how to practice it) reveals that the search for Jesus in the self is also a search for Jesus in humanity.

Given that Augustine’s word “word” appears to be an intellectual ancestor for the mode of thought I describe in this book, we can expect the “enigma” of Incarnational poetics to be expressed occasionally in specialized language such as Hilton uses, and to have a strong focus on words as signs that point deliberately and conspicuously to a reality beyond themselves. Further, such an “enigma” is likely to be found not only in the sense of the words themselves (their meanings) but also in the way in which an Incarnational poetic is expressed, in metaphor or figurative language that similarly indicates some “otherness” beyond its obvious sense, such as in 1 Cor. 13 and John 1:14. As such, it represents an intriguing example of the supereffable.

I wish to linger here for a moment over both the concept of otherness in language and the Pauline notion of charity as an aid to finding a likeness of God in humanity, in order to look in close detail at how Langland works through and reworks his understanding of the two. Otherness and likeness are interwoven in a most interesting way in the first epigraph to this chapter, Will’s search for charity in passus 16 of *Piers Plowman*. This passage highlights the act of seeking a glimpse of God (a theological problem) through and by means of thought expressed in language—in, that is, self-consciously formalistic language (a rhetorical or poetical problem). By the prominent yet somewhat enigmatic use of the word “figuratively” (l. 296), the passage also demonstrates language pointing to something beyond itself, something to be sought (a linguistic and a philosophical problem). In this context, the intriguing word “figuratively” encodes the expectation that the sought thing cannot be comprehended fully at

once in its own nature but must be understood by means of something-it-isn't, expressed in language-it-isn't—perhaps in and through time as a series of something-it-isn'ts, the “eddyding back of sense” of an Incarnational poetic, as I shall discuss in Chapter 5. My focus here is on how Langland experiments with the way in which language signifies, as he ponders a glimpse of God through the absence or presence of Christ's face.

Langland's “figuratyfly”

Did Langland invent the vernacular English word “figuratively”? If he did, what did he mean by it? In Latin, of course, the adjectival form had been used to describe figural (as opposed to literal) language,¹⁵ and certainly “figure” had been around in Middle English as a noun for quite some time, in a number of senses. They included, for example, “a written character,” whether mathematical, alphabetical, or numerical;¹⁶ the typological sense of “prefiguration” or “foreshadowing,” needed for the exegetical method used to connect the Old with the New Testament by reading events in Christ's life as “antitypes” that “fulfill” their corresponding “types” in Old Testament history;¹⁷ and three senses that are particularly important to medieval theories of cognition: “shape, form, appearance,” “representation, image, likeness,” and “form as opposed to matter; abstract form, concept.” One sense with special focus on linguistic expression itself, “a parable, a comparison or metaphor,” appears to have been under development in Langland's day, together with its adjectival and adverbial forms (figurative/figural, figuratively/figurally), meaning “allegorical, metaphoric, figurative, symbolic” and “in a figurative manner.” Readers of Chaucer may remember the General Prologue's strongly approving portrait of the Parson, who preaches from scripture: “And this figure he added eek [also] therto, / That if gold ruste, what shal iren [iron] do?”¹⁸ The particular “figure” he adds to scripture is, of course, a metaphor.

While Augustine had maintained a distinction between the phrases “*per speculum*” and “*in ænigmate*” from 1 Cor. 13:12, in the C-text of *Piers Plowman* Langland intriguingly appears to draw both into this one word, “figuratively.”¹⁹ What he means by that word, however, is open to some debate. The passage as it appears in C is substantially different from the comparable passage in B.²⁰ Those differences show Langland actively thinking about the nature of figurative language as well as about charity, and doing so not only in the abstract but more particularly in the context of fourteenth-century England and its

vernacular. Body and language are linked in “figuratyfly,” via 1 Cor. 13. It would be useful, then, to consider the B passage together with C.

In B, part of the Pauline text is in English (“*per speculum*,” written as “in a Mirour”) and the rest in Latin:

. . . in a Mirour:

Hic in enigmat, tunc facie ad faciem. (B.15.162–62a)

C retains the same Latin line but offers a different translation of “*per speculum*”:

And fynde hym, but figuratyfly . . . :

Hic in enigmat, tunc facie ad faciem. (16.296–96a)

“Mirour” in B is a direct translation from the Latin “*speculum*”; “figuratyfly” in C, however, results in a more challenging reading of 1 Cor. 13, collapsing into one word both mirror and enigma. Although “figuratyfly” here must surely emphasize a difference between that which is sought and that which is found, the word sustains more than one possible interpretation. On the one hand, “figuratyfly” points towards the linguistic puzzle of figurative language, or of typology: “And find him (i.e., Christ) but only in the form of a figure,” that is to say, in some conceptual, nonmaterial, form, or “in *enigmat*,” specifically opposed to “*facie ad faciem* (face to face), in the flesh. On the other, “figuratyfly” also suggests the materiality of the mirror (“*speculum*”) of 1 Cor. 13:12, a mirror being that in which one sees one’s “figure,” the face in particular. As Will looks for Christ and sees a reflection of his own humanity, Langland skillfully renders in one word both the notion of one’s own (human, fleshly) form as seen in a mirror *and* the pointing otherness of language: form and format coincide in “figuratyfly.” In both versions, to be sure, the general gist of the passage is similar. Will is complaining that even those in religious orders, those who, above all others, should lead lives patterned after Christ’s and so should be the best examples of charity—even *they* do not practice charity as they ought to (or, perhaps, at all). While this general sense is clear, the two versions approach the message with differing resonances. The question remains, when Will says “figuratyfly,” how much is this passage about language?

In C, Will is talking to Liberum Arbitrium (Anima, in B) about seeking Charity (Christ, in B):

“Charite,” quod y tho, “þat is a thyng forsothe
That maistres commenden moche. Where may hit be yfounde?
Ich haue yleued in londone monye longe 3eres
And fonde y neuere in faith, as freres hit precheth,
Charite þat chargeth nauht ne chyt thow me greue hym,

As poul in his pistul of hym bereth wittenesse:

Non inflatur, non est Ambiciosa.

I knewe neuere, by Crist, clerk noþer lewed

That he ne askede aftur his and oþerewhiles coueytede

Thyng that nedede hym nauhte and nyme hit yf a myhte.

For thogh me souhte alle þe sektes of susturne and brethurne

And fynde hym, but figuratyfly, a ferly me thynketh:

Hic in enigmat, tunc facie ad faciem.

And so y trowe treuly, by þat me telleth of charite.” (16.286–97)

“Charity,’ I said then, ‘is a thing, truly, that learned men commend highly. Where may it be found? I have lived in London many long years, and I never found, truly [or, with regard to faith], as friars preach it: charity [i.e., a charitable man], who takes no notice, nor quarrels, though people grieve him, as Paul in his epistle of him [i.e., charity] bears witness: ‘is not puffed up, is not ambitious’ [1 Cor. 13:4–5]. I never knew, by Christ, cleric or unlearned person who did not demand his own [material goods] and sometimes coveted a thing that he did not need, and take it, if he might! For although one might scrutinize all humanity/ all the religious orders of sisters and of brothers and encounter him only figuratively, a wonder I think it; ‘now in an enigma, then face to face’ [1 Cor. 13:12]. And so I believe truly, according to what people say about Charity.”

Will is complaining about his contemporaries’ failure to live without consistently putting their own material needs ahead of those of others. In particular, his complaint addresses what he perceives as clerical hypocrisy. “Secte,” a complicated word in *Piers Plowman*, in this context embraces the religious orders (“alle þe sektes of susturne and brethurne”): Will’s focus is on clerics. In its sense of “a group of followers,” “secte” has affinities with the verb “sechen,” “to follow,” here additionally rendered in “souhte”: those in religious orders “follow” Christ in a special way—or so they ought.²¹ According to Will’s complaint, neither charity in its abstract nature nor an example of a charitable person is to be found among the religious other than “figuratively,” and that is a particular wonderment (“ferly”) because among Christ’s followers is precisely where one would expect to find the best exemplar of charity, perhaps even Christ himself.²² So there is a satirical and pejorative tone to “figuratively” here: we expect something more like charity than we actually get, Will feels.²³

“Figuratively” correlates aptly with the Pauline text that follows it on line 16.296a in two ways: first, taking “enigma” in Augustine’s sense as “an allegory that is particularly difficult to interpret,” “figuratyfly” highlights allegoresis, or reading for a figurative sense: the clergy are not following Christ’s life to the letter, as it were, as they would do if they interpreted the “text” of his life, or scripture, correctly. Second, taking “figure” in its sense of “human form,” in particular the face, “figuratyfly” anticipates the “face to face” meeting

in heaven. Lingerin behind both aspects of “figure,” in the shadow, as it might be, is a sense of Christ in the flesh, someone whose body can be followed, or whose face was once seen by his followers, whose face will be seen again (and on that day it would be better for you if you had followed him closely while you could).²⁴

The face of Christ is even more conspicuous by its absence in the B-text, where “in a mirror” is as close as Will has come, he tells us, to seeing Christ. Here it is important to note that this time Will is more specifically looking for a charitable man than for the abstract quality of charity. Toward the end of the B-text passage, Will changes the nature of his search: instead of seeking the charitable man alone, he seeks to see Christ in his companions (though in one sense, this is simply another way of saying the same thing). What he sees is *like himself* “in a mirror”:

“What is charite?” quod I þo. “a childissh þyng,” he seide:
*“Nisi efficiamini sicut paruuli non intrabitis in regnum celorum?”*²⁵
 Wipouten fauntelte or folie a fre liberal wille. *childishness; foolishness; generous*
 “Where sholde men fynde swich a frend wip so fre an herte? *generous*
 I haue lyued in londe,” quod I, “my name is longe wille, *lived*
 And fond I neuere ful charite, bifore ne bihynde. *found; complete*
 Men beþ merciable to mendinaunt³ and to poore, *are; mendicants*
 And wollen lene þer þei leue lelly to ben paid. *give where they expect honestly*
 Ac charite þat Poul preiseþ best, and moost plesaunt to oure Saueour—
*Non inflatur, non est ambiciosa, non querit que sua sunt—*²⁶
 I sei3 neuere swich a man, so me god helpe, *saw; such*
 That he ne wolde aske after his, and ouperwhile coueite *would not; other times*
 Thyng þat neded hym nojt and nyme it if he my3te. *he did not need; take it*
 Clerkes kenne me þat crist is in alle places; *clerics teach*
 Ac I sei3 hym neuere sooply but as myself in a Mirour: *saw; truly*
Hic in enigmate, tunc facie ad faciem.
 And so I trowe trewely, by þat men telleth of charite, *believe*
 It is no3t chaumpions fight ne chaffare as I trowe.” (B.15.149–64) *business*

With the example of charity to mendicants and the poor and the reference to “chaffare” (“exchange, trade”), what sounds like a satirical twist (“wollen lene þer þei leue lelly to ben paid,” “will give [only] where they believe justly to be [re]paid”) merely plays out, rather literally, 1 Cor. 13:3 (“if I should distribute all my goods to feed the poor . . . and have not charity”).

In this B passage, with the famous “signature” in line 152,²⁷ Langland appears to be less ambitious about what he can accomplish than in the corresponding C passage. Its most challenging moment occurs in the analogue to C’s “figuratyfly”: “Ac I sei3 hym neuere sooply but as myself in a Mirour.” One way to read this line results in a solipsistic Will gazing, solitary, at himself. Line 152, with its focus on Will himself, perhaps reinforces this reading. More probably, however, the sentence carries the implication that a mirror reflects imperfectly, as a medieval mirror (possibly metal instead of glass)

might do: “but I never saw him [Christ] truly, except as [I see] myself in a mirour.”²⁸ Here in B, the *possibility* of seeing Christ in another person seems more solid than it does in C’s roundabout phrasing. The failure of that search is all the more stark when the lack of Christ’s face here (“Ac I sei3 hym nevere sooply”) is immediately contrasted with the promised sight in heaven (“*tunc facie ad faciem*”). By comparing B and C, we can see that Langland was thinking through ways of juxtaposing two failures, one (in B) that scripture leads us to expect (human limitations prevent us from perceiving as God does) and the other (in C) a surprise (the clergy—and indeed every other person Will knows—are not charitable). In both cases, his chosen means of putting these two points across draws attention to Christ’s face, even though the material face is absent, as well as to “enigma.” C’s “figuratyfly” seems the more striking when considered in conjunction with B’s “in a mirour”; Langland quite deliberately puts the focus on language’s signifying nature in C, a point that emerges more clearly when one reads C just after having read B.

Language, embodiment, cognition: all are linked inseparably in Langland’s use of “figuratively.” Like the mirror and enigma of 1 Cor. 13, “figuratively” is not so much ambiguous as it is overloaded with meaning. This raises the question: could Langland have achieved the same effect in other words? Is figuration ornamental and thus extralinguistic, or is it fundamental to language (or, possibly, to thought)? The answer is not inconsequential for medieval writers who find an extra level of complexity in paradox of the sort expressed in “the Word was made flesh,” in part because divinity and humanity are analogously compressed, or coalesced, or expressed in the hypostatic union. For medieval writers, one aspect of the issue can be framed in practical terms: if God’s language of love finds expression in the Incarnation, how can poets then write, as nearly as possible, in the likeness of God’s language? Because they write only infrequently in theoretical terms about their strategies, to elucidate their thought about the signifying potential of metaphor it will be helpful to look first at a range of ways metaphor has been theorized more recently. In particular, we should consider two questions at length: first, can metaphor and other tropes convey meaning that cannot be paraphrased? Second, is a meaningful distinction to be made between “literal” and “figurative” language?

Metaphor: Ornamental or Fundamental?

Metaphor lies in a contested area of linguistics (or, depending on one’s

taxonomies, rhetoric). Up to the present day, even what a metaphor is has generated considerable debate. According to a long-lived way of thinking about metaphor that dates back to Aristotle, metaphor, like figurative language more generally, is an ornamental aspect of style. “Say it more plainly,” “Be more direct”: these sorts of responses to metaphor suggest a mindset in which supereffability would be considered poetical, at best, and superfluous, at worst. At the opposite pole, increasing numbers of cognitive theorists assert that metaphor is fundamental to thought, not an “add-on” to language. My intent here is first to lay out the nature of that debate, then to consider where fourteenth-century writers stand relative to these arguments.

Most people recognize some sort of distinction between the uses of *flew* in the following sentences:

The crow flew across the field.
The boy flew across the field.

Most are likely to agree that the first instance uses the literal sense of the word, and the second a figurative. How do we recognize the difference, however, when the structure of these sentences is virtually identical? The answer must lie in what we know about crows and boys relative to the verb, “to fly.” We bring to a linguistic situation something of our knowledge of the world and apply that knowledge in differentiating between the senses, literal and figurative.²⁹

To approach this issue from another angle, suppose I announce that “Richard is a lion.”³⁰ How would you decide whether or not the sentence contains a metaphor, given that I might be talking about a person or, perhaps, an animal? The sentence as applied to a tawny big cat includes precisely the same words, in the same sequence, as the sentence as applied to a human king of England. Probabilities come into play: without further context, most people would read the sentence as figurative in part because I have used a rather common metaphor, in part because Richard is an unusual name for an animal, and in part, perhaps, because real lions are less frequently a topic of conversation in most settings than are people. Context does make a difference: if “Richard is a lion” and we know Richard to be the king of England, to have hands and feet rather than four paws, to speak rather than roar, we are likely to reject the notion that he is a tawny big cat and cast about for some other way to make sense of the word “lion,” probably, in this instance, by associations we are accustomed to make between lions and courage, lions and pride, lions and ferocity, lions and royalty, perhaps even lions and England.

Since I. A. Richards introduced them in 1936, the terms “tenor” and “vehicle” have provided a useful means to talk about what happens, technically, in a metaphor such as this one. In Richards’s

terms, “lion” is the vehicle (word that does the pointing) that carries the tenor (“other sense,” not directly on the page) of “courage,” or “pride,” or “ferocity,” or “royalty,” or a combination of these and other possible meanings. In this model, the metaphor “Richard is a lion” carries a sense other than what it “literally” says, pointing to a meaning, or range of “figurative” meanings, other than “tawny big cat.” According to Richards, the juncture of tenor and vehicle in a metaphor says something that a literal paraphrase does not; metaphor therefore has a cognitive component in addition to its linguistic ones, and that cognitive outcome results from a “figural” reading.³¹

Under such a definition of metaphor, is it possible that metaphors can signify differently, not just in various contexts but also in diverse modes of thought? The special juncture of theological, philosophical, psychological, linguistic, and semantic issues brought together in “the Word made flesh” makes writers interested in Incarnation theology a particularly appealing source for study of metaphor. Obviously, they can draw on established traditions that offer technical expressions or methods of meditation, but is there more to their language than that? Do writers who seek to express the supereffable use metaphor in the same way as those who have more mundane things to say? In his sensitive and nuanced study of how the English mystics, including Julian, Hilton, and the Cloud-author, use language, Wolfgang Riehle asserts that metaphor, in mystical tradition, operates differently from ordinary linguistic metaphor in taking into account Origen’s theorizing of “spiritual senses” analogous to the bodily senses:

... English texts are continuing a trend which has a long tradition in Latin mysticism, which indeed goes back to Origen who developed the theological doctrine of the spiritual senses, and who seems to have held that man does not merely possess physical sense organs but spiritual ones as well. . . . If the mystics now frequently use the language of earthly sense perceptions in a spiritual meaning when relating their personal experiences, then it would be wrong, as we have already indicated, to understand and assess this language simply as the use of metaphor in the normal sense of the term, for *this is no mere makeshift language but rather one in which the mystical experience itself takes place*. In theological terms the “spiritual senses” are not just five powers permanently residing in the soul—by analogy with the physical senses—but are temporary spiritual acts, ultimately effected by divine grace. In these acts it seems to the soul that it is experiencing a supernatural object which reveals itself as if it were present in some concrete manner. Hence this spiritual sense perception can certainly become similar to that of the physical senses, and *therefore the language which expresses such experiences is something rather different than mere metaphor*.³² (emphasis mine)

Riehle’s implication is that metaphor’s cognitive outcomes can be contingent on the frame of mind or practice of a writer or a reader. “This is no mere makeshift language but rather one in which the mystical experience itself takes place,” Riehle says, indicating, it would seem, that mystical experience and language are linked, or, to put it another way, individuals can experience mystical union with

God as *metaphorical language*. Is Riehle right to think that “the language which expresses such experiences is something rather different than mere metaphor”? The answer will lie in what one thinks metaphor is, or does. Under a theory in which metaphor is thought to be ornamental, “mystical” metaphor could perhaps have a different outcome from “ordinary” metaphor, but it seems it would have to be, in reality, something other than metaphor. The mildly pejorative “mere makeshift language” Riehle applies to metaphor suggests he is thinking in these terms. Riehle’s point of view is especially interesting when considered alongside the Richards model, however. If meaning is added in the interaction between tenor and vehicle, is “mystical” language fundamentally different from other language? Does it not have the “literal” and “figurative” senses important for Richards’s model? Certainly it may make use of technical components ordinary discourse does not— one might need to define the word “word,” for instance, or “spiritual senses” (as Riehle acknowledges Origen did)— but such an option is available to all writers, not just to mystics. In fact, fourteenth-century English writers who were not themselves mystics helped to create the availability in English of precisely this sort of theological discourse. Nevertheless, both Hilton and Julian talk about a bodily/spiritual dichotomy similar to the one Riehle describes, one surely derived from Origen’s “spiritual senses.” While in some ways the dualism it offers appears likely to align with the literal/figurative divide, in fact the bodily/spiritual dichotomy is not entirely compatible with the literal/figurative model. In addition, the bodily/spiritual dichotomy is of particular interest for Incarnational poetics, because, unlike the literal/figurative model, it is based in embodied experience, and it also is not grounded in the Cartesian mind/body dualism. While the notion that metaphor might have a theological dimension may seem like a conceptual add-on to language to many (though not all) moderns, the notion was entirely commonplace in the Middle Ages. Before looking more closely at the bodily/spiritual dichotomy, however, it is important to understand certain complications of the literal/figurative divide on which Richards’s model of metaphor depends. This brings us to the second of the two questions I posed just before this section: is a meaningful distinction to be made between “literal” and “figurative” language?

The Problem of the Literal Sense

A major, ongoing problem with thinking about language as having literal and figurative senses has been to define those senses. A second

problem is that we still do not know how we recognize a difference between figurative and literal uses of language. In my example of “Richard is a lion,” I considered a figurative sense only after I rejected a literal sense: Richard is not a tawny big cat; therefore, I need to find another way to make sense of the sentence. This “literal-first” model of cognition has a long history. In Book 3 of *On Rhetoric*, for instance, Aristotle classified metaphor as an aspect of style; in his view it is important, therefore, that the comparison be fitting and proportionate. Judgment of those qualities depends on evaluation of the literal sense, which must be readily observed: “One should speak both epithets and metaphors that are appropriate, and this will be from an analogy. If not, the expression seems inappropriate because opposites are most evident when side-by-side each other” (*On Rhetoric* 3.2.9). While Aristotle’s attention here is less on the figurative sense per se than on the nature of the comparison put into play, he goes on to demonstrate that suitable metaphors draw on apt comparisons. Later he notes that the value of metaphor comes in its invoking a new idea (most obvious when the “opposites” are yoked together), and its success depends on the swiftness and clarity with which it puts that idea across:

To learn easily is naturally pleasant to all people, and words signify something, so whatever words create knowledge in us are the pleasantest. . . . Metaphor most brings about learning; for when he calls old age “stubble,” he creates understanding and knowledge through the genus, since both old age and stubble are species of the genus of things that have lost their bloom. . . . Those things are necessarily urbane, both in *lexis* and in enthymemes, which create quick learning in our minds. That is why superficial enthymemes are not popular with audiences (by *superficial* I mean those that are altogether clear and which there is no need to ponder), nor are those which, when stated, are unintelligible, but those are popular of which there is either immediate understanding when they are spoken, even if that was not previously existing, or the thought follows soon after; for then some kind of learning takes place, but in neither of the other cases. (*On Rhetoric* 3.10.2–4)

So it is the “riddle” aspect of a metaphor (Augustine’s “enigma”) that makes it so useful for conveying that new idea, but that new idea comes about because of the swift comparison we make between two known things whose literal sense we process to arrive at the aptness of the comparison (*On Rhetoric* 3.2.12: “metaphors are made like riddles”). According to Aristotle, good metaphors are didactic in that we learn from them, and pleasurable in that what we learn is expressed in a new way we grasp readily because of the apt comparison. All this depends on immediate recognition of the literal sense, then quick recognition of the figurative sense.

Such a “literal-first” model would seem to render “figurative” problematic at the expense of “literal”; it presumes we recognize “literal” when we see it, and that “literal” is the normative mode for interpretation. Why use “figurative” when you could use “literal”? An extension of that way of thinking pushes towards “figurative is

ornamental.” This view of language was certainly available to fourteenth-century writers. Chaucer, for instance, makes use of it in his *House of Fame*, where figuration appears as an ornamental form of language, an instance of high style:

Telle me this now feythfully,
Have y not preved thus symply,
Without any subtilite
Of speche, or gret prolixite
Of termes of philosophie,
Of figures of poetrie,
Or colours of rethorike? (*House of Fame*, ll. 853–59)

Chaucer more directly associates figuration with high rhetorical style when the Host admonishes, in the *Clerk’s Prologue*:

Telle us so ~~pleynly~~ ^{plausibly} thyng of adventures.
Youre termes, youre colours, and youre figures,
Keepe hem in stoor til so be ye endite
Heigh style, as whan that men to kynges write. store; until the time when
Speketh so pleyn at this tyme, we yow preye,
That we may understonde what ye seye. (*Clerk’s Prologue*, ll. 15–20)

In these examples, figurative language is ornamental but not simply ornamental; it carries social and class implications embedded in hierarchy. It tends to privilege learning and, perhaps, masks deception. These examples in isolation do something of a disservice to Chaucer, of course, whose imaginative and playful verse betrays a highly nuanced celebration of language’s capacity to signify simultaneously in more than one direction; they do, however, demonstrate that Chaucer was willing to use the literal/figurative model for satirical purposes. In this passage, the Host articulates the very requests to which I referred at the beginning of this section: “say it plainly”; “be direct.” Don’t speak like a poet, or an academic! Although writers easily intoxicated by language may find it difficult to bear in mind, we all know someone who has little patience with metaphor and is apt to sound very much like the Host.

Under the literal/figurative model, however, even determining the literal sense is surprisingly problematical. This is an intensely important, if counterintuitive, point. In the example of “Richard is a lion,” “lion” as a vehicle pointed to a whole range of tenors. However, multiplicity of meaning does not lie solely within the figurative sense: for example, how do we determine the literal sense of the sentence, “Richard is a lion,” even when we know Richard is a tawny big cat? As a signifier, “lion” can point to more than one meaning even on a literal level: emphatically a singular example of the species, for instance (“Richard is a lion [not several lions]”), or a male of the species (“Richard is a lion [not a lioness]”). Moreover, many words

also have literal meanings that could as easily be defined as figurative, depending on the taxonomy we establish for a word's definition.³³

To take one fourteenth-century example, what is "the literal sense" of Julian's famous assertion that she sees God "in a point"? "And after this I saw God in a poynte, that is to sey, in myn vnderstandyng, be which sight I saw that he is in al things" (11.4–5). "Poynte" here is sometimes translated as "an instant," an [immediate] point in time; that, of course, is a real possibility, and could be considered a literal sense.³⁴ By contrast, the *MED* cites "I saw God in a poynte" as an example under 3c, "a geometric point," rather than under 4a, "a brief period of time," where "in a point" is also defined as "in an instant."³⁵ Julian has been describing, in a rich and ambiguous series of images, what God looks like to her. Yet, her further explanation ("that is to sey") moves in the direction of a spatial distinction, "in myn vnderstandyng."³⁶ Does she mean, "within the limits of my capacity to understand, I saw God in an instant," or does she mean, "I saw God in a 'poynte,' and that 'poynte' is [spatially] in my understanding"? This reading draws on the intimacy of interiority in a way that "in an instant" does not. The spatial dimension is reinforced by her further description of the lesson of her vision, that "he is in al things," which prompts an analogy between the spatial qualities of "in" understanding and "in" things. Where is "in myn vnderstandyng"? Within her mind? Does "myn vnderstandyng" denote a specific, if in this case internalized, location, a point at the center of the self? To put that another way, are *conceptual* locations necessarily *figurative* ones? Or, to go in a different direction, is Julian's "poynte" closer to "a critical or decisive moment or situation, a crisis" (*MED* 5a), or even a "state of being, condition, situation, disposition" (*MED* 10a) ("I've come to the point where I feel it is useless to go on"; "I am put to a poynt þat pouerte hatte [is called]"³⁷)? Julian has certainly "come to the point" where she understands something about God that she did not understand before; however we translate "poynte," this, surely, is true. Is that condition of being ("come to a point") a figurative sense based on "time" or "place" or a literal sense in its own right? One delight of language is that several, or indeed all, of these definitions may be simultaneously true. The word "point" is certainly polysemous, and a skillful writer, such as Julian, can readily take advantage of the malleable quality of the literal sense.

The problem of recognizing "the literal sense" is real, then, although often overlooked, and was established well before Julian wrote about seeing God "in a poynte." Multiple signification can be as much a characteristic of the literal level as it is of the figurative, as was acknowledged by scholastic philosophers and theologians, such as Thomas Aquinas and Nicholas of Lyre, in the thirteenth and early

fourteenth centuries after the rediscovery of Aristotle.³⁸ In *De Doctrina Christiana*, Augustine similarly noted the figurative potential of the literal sense, although he believed it to be distinguishable from figurative language, which he describes as enigmatical (allegorical).³⁹

That figurative potential in the literal sense is of real interest to fourteenth-century writers, who exploit it for poetical, theological, and philosophical effect, as Julian's "poynte" and Langland's "figuratyfly" demonstrate. It is also of interest to present-day cognitive linguists, who have done away with the literal/figurative divide by asserting that metaphor is fundamental to cognition, using "conceptual metaphor," or "the embodied mind theory of metaphor," as theorized by George Lakoff and others. In their view, metaphor is primarily a cognitive function and only secondarily a linguistic one. According to this model, people think in metaphorical terms; all thought is metaphorical in nature. Behind any particular linguistic expression of a metaphor, then, lies a root version of the metaphor, a "conceptual metaphor." In this theory, embodiment is directly responsible for the cognitive processes that interpret language as meaning something other than what it appears to say directly, because "there are important links between people's recurring bodily experiences, their metaphorical projections of these image schema to better structure many abstract concepts, and the language used to talk about these concepts."⁴⁰ Because such a view of language processing denies a disjunction in levels of meaning, it also implicitly denies the notion that figuration is mere ornament. Although I have not seen this acknowledged directly by cognitive linguists, if figuration is fundamental to thought, there can be no meaningful literal/figurative divide.⁴¹

Linguists phrase conceptual metaphors as a simple declarative sentence, usually of the "A is B" type, and set them off typographically for ready recognition. As an example of a conceptual metaphor, consider how common it is in English to use the verb that describes the sensory perception of sight as a verb describing cognitive perception: "I see what you mean," or "in my view," or, possibly, "I saw God in a poynte," or "I sei3 hym neuere sooply but as myself in a Mirour." Eve Sweetser has argued that the conceptual metaphor UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING, a subset of the more general conceptual metaphor THE MIND IS THE BODY, explains the semantic shift from the sense "see" to "know" across diverse Indo-European languages where diachronic linguistics can supply no such relation, but where the root metaphor UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING is a shared feature of Indo-European conceptual systems.⁴²

Conceptual metaphor also expands the range of metaphor itself. Aristotle's model draws together two somewhat-like, somewhat-unlike

things in a comparison that could be phrased in a literal fashion. The Richards model retains the quality of language pointing to something other than itself that we saw in Augustine's sign theory. By admitting that meaning is gained in bringing tenor and vehicle together, the model widens the scope of what metaphor is and does, opening the door to a cognitive component to metaphor. Conceptual metaphor vastly expands what counts as metaphor: if we think metaphorically, everything we think is grounded in root metaphors. So metaphor means something fundamentally different to Lakoff, it would seem, from what it does to Riehle, for instance. Riehle's view aligns well, however, with another branch of metaphor studies, epitomized by John Searle's use of speech act theory, that takes an entirely different tack by situating metaphor's meaning in its use. Like Lakoff's conceptual metaphor approach, this school of thought is inherently antithetical to the literal versus figurative dichotomy.⁴³

I have explained that metaphor can be thought of as an ornamental feature of language or a fundamental aspect of thought, that both "literal" and "figurative" are problematically polyvalent, and that the theory of conceptual metaphor appears to be incompatible with the literal/figurative duality. I deferred considering the dichotomy Julian and Hilton use in place of literal and figurative when they talk about the problem of signification, "bodily" (material) versus "ghostly" (spiritual) sight or understanding. To clarify the distinction between the two dichotomies, bodily/ghostly and literal/figurative, it is useful to begin with some examples that do not explicitly address the paradox of the Incarnation.

"A ghostly conseyte of a bodely thing": The Material/Spiritual Divide and the Hermeneutics of Christ's Body

Julian and Hilton repeatedly warn their readers that the two modes of understanding, "bodily" and "ghostly," must be kept distinct. In their view, embodied creatures can only speak or write about spiritual concepts in terms analogous to embodied experience. Given the proper mindset, however, that bodily constriction can be transcended, at least in part. As the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* puts it:

For þof al þat a þing be neuer so goostly in itself, neuerþeles 3it 3if it schal be spoken of, siþen [because] it so is þat speche is a bodely werk wrou3t [fashioned] wiþ þe tonge, þe whiche is an instrument of þe body, it behoueþ [behooves] alweis be spoken in bodely wordes. Bot what þerof? Schal it þerfore be taken & conceyuid [conceived] bodely? Nay, bot goostly.⁴⁴

No matter how ethereal a thing is in its essential nature, the *Cloud*-author says, it can only be spoken of with the bodily organ he has earlier called the “blabryng fleschely tonge” (26.37).⁴⁵ Words are bodily in that they are fashioned by embodied creatures and enunciated by means of body parts (rather than in pre-thought, as in Augustine’s “word”). However, the *Cloud*-author admonishes, they should not be understood to signify only in a body-focused, material fashion. He goes on to describe fantasy, the product of the imagination working without the aid of grace or reason, as “nou3t [nothing] elles bot a bodely conseyte [“conceit,” conception] of a goostly þing, or elles a goostly conseyte of a bodely þing” (65.28–30).⁴⁶ The error of fantasy, as he sees it, is contingent on misreading in either direction: bodily as ghostly or ghostly as bodily.

While bodily does not necessarily equate to literal nor ghostly to figurative, like the literal/figurative duality, the bodily/ghostly one implies a default position. The two-directional chiasm of the *Cloud*-author’s phrasing is exceptional; habitually, Julian, Hilton, and the *Cloud*-author warn their readers only that they should not interpret as “bodily” what is meant “ghostly,” but not the reverse. When they do, they are concerned primarily with the danger that they will be misunderstood and their contemplative readers will fall into error as a result. At the same time, interestingly, they reveal in part what they think about cognitive processing of language. As in the literal-first theory of metaphor, there is a presumed default; by analogy, we might call it “bodily-first.”

Because of that bodily-first default, the bodily/ghostly dichotomy allows for specially suitable alignment of the material with the immaterial in a way the abstract concepts of “literal” and “figurative” do not. For instance, when Julian stops to explain the nature of the weeping of a soul in chapter seventy-two, she ties that interpretation directly to the bodily/ghostly dichotomy rather than the literal/figurative one:

therefore it is that I sey we may never stinten [stop] of moning [moaning] ne of wepyng. *This weping meneth not al in poryng out of teares by our bodily eye, but also to more gostly vnderstandyng; for the kindly desire of our soule is so gret and so onmesurable [immeasurable] that if it were goven us to our solace and to our comfort al the noblyth that ever God made in hevyn and in erth, and we saw not the fair blisfull chere of hymselfe, yet we shuld not stynten of moning [refrain from moaning] ne of gostly weping, that is to sey, of peynfull longyng, till whan we sen verily the faire blisfull chere of our maker.* (72.43–52, emphasis mine)

In this case, the probable influence of Origen’s “spiritual senses” seems more apparent than in the example from the *Cloud*-author. Julian generates a concrete image of a physical sensation her readers will have experienced in their own bodies, only to renounce the materiality of that sensation by saying, “do not cry only with your

body, cry also in an analogous way in the immaterial sensation of your soul.” The technique is similar to the inevitable duality generated by a warning such as “don’t think of an elephant!”—and there he is, an imagined elephant alongside the imaginary space in which no imagined elephant should exist. Note that I can think of no way to express the simultaneous existence of these two thoughts (elephant and no-elephant) except in spatial or temporal terms— one “alongside” the other or “simultaneous” to another, a point to which I shall return.⁴⁷ Julian’s use of metaphor is especially skillful here, since the bodily practice of weeping is also appropriate to the spiritual one she advocates.

While Julian manages to align “bodily” and “ghostly” weeping suitably, Hilton takes particular pains to explain the nonmaterial aspect of the metaphor “God is a fire,” only to introduce a new, equally material metaphor, WORDS OF SCRIPTURE UNDERSTOOD IN THEIR “GHOSTLY” SENSE ARE SAVORY FOOD. Like Julian, Hilton habitually employs the exegetical technique of explaining a text, translating Latin scriptural verses into English. He gives both versions but adjusts the English translations slightly, according to his purpose, as he goes. In the following example, he is commenting on the process of interpreting scripture, noting how scripture requires “goostli” understanding. Hilton’s means of explaining the difference between bodily and ghostly understanding intriguingly and immediately introduces further metaphor, in the word “savour”:

On the selve wise [*same way*] it is seid that God is fier [*fire*]: *Deus noster ignis consumens est* (Hebrews 12:29). That is: Oure Lord is fier wastande [*consuming*]. That is for to seyn, God is not fier elementarie, that heteth [*heats*] a bodi and brenneth [*burns*] it, but God is love and charité. For as fier wasteth al bodili thinge that mai be wasted, right so the love of God wasteth and brenneth al synne oute of the soule and maketh it clene, as fier maketh clene al manere metal. *Thise wordis, and alle othere that aren spoken of oure Lord in hooli wrytynge bi bodili liknesse, moste nedis* [*necessarily*] *ben undirstonden goostli, ellis there is no savour in hem.*

Neverthelees, the cause whi siche maner wordis aren seid of oure Lord in Holi Writ is this. For we aren so fleschli that we conne [*know*] not of God, ne undirstonde of Hym, but yif we bi siche [*by such*] wordes first ben entred in. Neverthelees, whanne the innere iye [*eye*] is opened thorough grace for to han a litil sight of Jhesu, thanne schal the soule turne lightli [*readily*] inowgh alle sich wordes of bodili thyngis into goostli undirstondynge. (2.33.2278–89, emphasis mine)

To the “fire” of Heb. 12:29, Hilton adds a metaphor explicitly derived from the bodily experience of the senses: the “savour” of the words of scripture, with its roots in monastic *lectio divina*, or *ruminatio*, the “chewing over” of scripture in silent contemplation. Interestingly, he does not feel compelled, however, to warn against a bodily reading of “savour,” even though he is speaking just as metaphorically here as did the verse from Hebrews.

Such subtle distinctions between the dichotomies of bodily/ghostly

and literal/figurative show that when Julian and Hilton talk about the signifying properties of the language they use, they do so in terms already focused on the materiality of embodied existence. When they go on to mull over the nature of the Incarnation, they are predisposed to be thinking about language, embodiment, and cognition as part of an interconnected system. Their focus on the bodily/ghostly divide draws attention to the gap between signs and their significations—at least for human language. Moreover, their language gestures at the possibility of a linguistic system (God’s language) that is more holistic than the one they know. Their efforts to stretch the sense of words, to use language flexibly and suggestively, reveal a focus on an abstract reality beyond the confines of linguistic signification. In the context of the Incarnation, the bodily/ghostly dichotomy’s distinction between materiality and spirit becomes blurred in the paradoxical jointure of humanity and divinity in the hypostatic union.

The hypostatic union’s emphasis on body and form enables a mode of thought in which language can border on the sacramental. Because the unique case of the Logos as signifier links embodiment with language in an enigmatic way, the hermeneutics of Christ’s body have historically been perceived as inherently different from hermeneutics of embodiment in general. Beginning in the eleventh century, scholastic debate eventually led to the doctrine of the Real Presence, which affirms that Christ’s body remains substantially present in the consecrated Eucharistic bread and wine. The discourse was framed, in part, in grammatical terms: could the predicate “my body” in the words of consecration, “*Hoc est corpus meum*,” obliterate its own subject, “this” [i.e., the bread]?⁴⁸ Real Presence also lent itself to metaphysical argument: when the priest consecrates the elements, are the bread and wine entirely replaced by the body and blood of Christ, or do they coexist with it, or are they symbols of it? Scholastic discussion of the issue drew from an Aristotelian understanding of “substance” and “accidents” that allowed the “substance” of Christ’s body to appear in the form of bread, a form that retained the bread’s “accidental” qualities. I am collapsing several centuries of Eucharistic theological controversy into simple formulations here to emphasize that the Aristotelian terms used argumentatively in this controversy informed the treatment of the Incarnation in the writings under consideration in this study, that these terms continue to influence critical perceptions of such works and related issues today, and that recognizing such underpinnings can elucidate the theological bent of such works.

In focusing on the bodily/ghostly dichotomy, then, Julian and Hilton disclose a “language of religion” importantly coalesced around embodied experience, with “bodily-first” as the default.⁴⁹ In the right

context, the commonality of human experience also enables daring attempts to perceive beyond the limitations of embodied experience. In investigating the literal sense, I used the example of Julian seeing God “in a poynte” and “in my vnderstondyng,” where she describes thought or comprehension in terms of spatial orientation relative to herself. Conceptual metaphors are similarly understood to be oriented from the experience of the embodied mind. To conclude my discussion of the bodily/ ghostly aspect of medieval uses of metaphor, it is instructive to examine a single further example, one related to UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING: how may spatial metaphor be used to think about cognition? By looking at one metaphor as used by Julian, Hilton, and metaphor theorists, we may better see the ways in which fourteenth-century use of metaphor and the present day theory of conceptual metaphor coincide and differ, with respect to the nature of cognition.

“Up” and “Down”: A Spatial Example

Intriguingly, Julian uses spatial metaphor to explain the nature of the Trinity just before she warns her readers not to think about the Trinity in material, spatial terms (“don’t think of an elephant”):

Now stondith not the Son aforne the Fadir on the left syde as a laborer, but he sittith on his Fadirs ryte hand in endles rest and peace. But it is not ment that the Son syttith on the ryte hond, syde be syde, as on [one] man sittith be another in this lif; for ther is no such syttyng, as to my syte [*sight*], in the Trinite; but he sittith on his Fadirs ryte hand, that is to sey, in the heyst noblyth [rank] of the Fadirs ioyes. (51.322–28)

Here she wants to demonstrate the honor the Father accords the Son; she does so in spatial terms that rely on a cultural understanding of social ranking in ceremonial sitting. She creates a spatial picture analogous to embodied experience, then disrupts the picture by asserting that the Trinity does not sit side by side.⁵⁰ While here Julian is relating what she saw in vision, her method of explaining it shows not just what she saw, but also what she feels is important to stress in interpreting what she saw. In her view, we should not understand her vision by imagining bodily posture or positioning for the bodiless Trinity in the same way we would for embodied men. By saying “as to my syte,” she chooses a concrete way of saying what she perceived, a way that is oriented from embodied sensory experience. I did the same thing by saying “in her view” (in Sweetser’s mode of thought, these metaphors would be particular instances of the conceptual metaphor UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING). Positioning of time and space has no meaning with regard to an all-encompassing, ever-being God, Julian suggests.

In linguistic terms, God's deictic center, the locational and temporal *origo* for the speaking subject, must be everywhere, always. The *Cloud-author* makes a similar point by noting that, although we say that heaven is "up," we should not physically turn our bodily eyes to the sky to see it, because "up" with regard to heaven is no earthly direction at all:

sipen [*because*] it so was þat Criste schul assende bodely, & þerafter sende þe Holy Goost bodely, þen it was more semely [*fitting*] þat it was upwardes & fro abouen, þan ouþer donwardes & fro byneþen, byhinde or before, on o [one] side or on oþer. Bot elles ne were þis semelines, him nedid [needed] neuer þe more to haue wente upwardes þen donwardes, I mene for nerenes [nearness] of þe wey. For heuen goostly is as nei3 [near] doun as up, & up as down, bihinde as before, before as behynde, on o syde as oþer. (60.22–29)⁵¹

Language that locates God in a specific time or place to the exclusion of other time or place must be processed as "ghostly"; must it also be what we might call figurative? Julian's further explanation, akin to a "literal" development of the "figurative" use of "syde by syde," adds a further spatial component, "in the heyest noblyth of the Fadirs ioies." Surprisingly, because this common way to express the extreme honor she wants to denote includes another spatial term, "highest," her further explanation replicates exactly the sort of spatial reference she wants to correct, but, like Hilton with "savour," she does not draw attention to this second case of "do not take in bodily terms what I mean in spiritual ones." It is impossible to tell precisely why. On the one hand, no one could qualify every instance; that would be tedious and repetitive. On the other, if we consider "highest" in terms of literal and figurative senses instead, we are back at the problem of the literal sense: because "highest" is commonly used for hierarchical relationship, such use might seem normative or nonfigurative (as in a dead metaphor). Here is another place where the bodily/ghostly dichotomy and the literal/figurative one truly differ: while we could make a case for "highest" being either literal or figurative, in Julian's context we could not make a case for its hierarchical usage being "bodily." She does not want us to perceive the direction in spatial terms relative to our bodies. In a cognitive model of metaphor, the social scale implied in Julian's spatial hierarchy makes sense, though, because it aligns with a conceptual metaphor identified by cognitive linguists as "GOOD IS UP," wherein things associated with elevation are processed as positive.

Hilton similarly calls attention to the word "above," which in its spiritual sense, he points out, has no spatial orientation (in its figurative sense, "above," like "higher," has no spatial orientation, only a hierarchical one). Like Julian, Hilton uses the bodily/ghostly dichotomy to explain how to think about God. Hilton's argument, too, would fit comfortably in a textbook on conceptual metaphor: the

orientation “above,” known from bodily experience of the world, provides the underlying conceptual metaphor that enables us to think of “above” in terms of degrees of merit. Again, the conceptual metaphor is GOOD IS UP:

Therefore ther are many men that erren [*err*] in undirstondynge of summe wordes that aren seid of God, for thei undirstonden hem not goostli. Hooli Writte seith that a soule that wole fynde God schal liften upward the innere iye [*eye*] and seke [*seek*] God above itself. Thanne summe that wolde doon aftir this seiynge [*advice*] undirstonden this word “aboven hemself,” as for higher settynge in stide [*place*, “*stead*”] and for worthiere of place, as oon element or oon planete is above anothir in settynge and in worthinesse of bodili place; but it is not so goostli. For a soule is above a bodili thyng not bi settynge of stide, but bi sūtilté [*lack of materiality*] and worthinesse of kynde [*nature*]. Right so, in the selve wise, God is above alle bodili and goostli creaturis, not bi settynge of stide, but thorough sūtilté and worthinesse of his unchaungeable blissid kynde. And therefore he that wole wisili [*wisely*] seke God and fynden him, he schal not renne [*run*] oute with his thought as yif he wolde clymbe above the sunne and persen [*pierce*] the firmament, and imagyne the majesté as it were a light of an hundred sonnes. But he schal rather drawe down the sunne and al the firmament, and forgeten it and casten it binethen hym ther as he is, and setten al this and al bodili thinge also at nought [*nothing*], and thenken [*think*] thanne yif he can goostli, bothe of himself and of God also. And yif he doo thus, thanne seeth the soule aboven himself and thanne seeth it hevене. (2.33.2236–51)

Hilton’s particular way of explaining the metaphor sounds closer to analogy or even simile than what most people are likely to think of as metaphor, at least, the sort of metaphor definable by tenor and vehicle.⁵² Analogy makes particular sense in cases where a writer wants to liken a bodily sensation, experience, or orientation, to a spiritual equivalent; Augustine used the same technique in *De Trinitate*, for the same reason. As with Julian’s passage, here, too, “above” connotes a social hierarchy, as Hilton notes before correcting that reading in order to offer a spiritual meaning. The hierarchy is to be found not in social, physical positioning, but in “kynde,” the nature of the soul (in the first example) and the nature of God (in the second).⁵³

The medieval writers who are the subject of this study are of one mind in thinking that cognition is molded by sensory perception. Since they are not primarily interested in the nature of cognition, however, they strive for something more than that, something beyond that. Thinking back to Riehle’s explanation of why mystical language is not the same as “mere metaphor,” in Riehle’s terms the bodily/ghostly divide I have been tracking resides in sensory experience rather than in language. That makes mystical experience sound like the “ghostly” analogue to embodied conceptual metaphor, on the one hand. On the other hand, expressing the mystical experience in language offers a challenge similar to that of expressing the metaphor-that-is-not-to-be-considered-a-metaphor, “the Word made Flesh.”

To a modern sensibility, Julian’s and Hilton’s examples of bodily orientation might sound as if they are addressed to a simple-minded

reader, who—as more advanced, more complex-thinkers realize—needs the most rudimentary guidance to follow what ought to be obvious to the plainest intelligence. While Julian’s prose is simple on the surface, however, her ideas are challenging in their complexity, and the further one reads, the more clear it becomes that the sort of warnings Julian and Hilton offer are well worth having. Such is the case when Julian aims to explain the nature of the connection between God and humanity, for which the mediating hypostatic union is a crucial element. In a theologically complex manner through largely straightforward syntax, Julian engages perplexing questions related to 1 Cor. 13, with which this chapter began: how can mankind be made in the image of God? Wherein does likeness reside? To answer these questions, Julian structures her argument to place the hermeneutics of Christ’s body in the center. Hers is a philosophically informed, heightened version of the bodily/ghostly dichotomy for perception, but in this case she treats ontology, the very existence of God in his own nature. While my previous examples from medieval writers have been isolated snippets of arguments primarily about something other than language or Incarnation, Julian needs the technical tools of Augustine’s “enigma” to work towards an answer that expresses the unusual quality of the hypostatic union, the nature of which is precisely the point. She does so by means of the technical terms, “substance” and “sensuality.”

Substance and Sensuality in Julian’s A Revelation of Love

Julian deliberates over the concepts of “substance” and “sensuality” as she examines how Christ mediates between God and humanity. Her treatment of the issue is rooted in Augustinian ideas that underlie the concept of “enigma.” Augustine introduces the same terms, substance and sensuality, in *De Trinitate* at the point in Book 12 where he distinguishes between the higher and lower reason in the soul. The terms were subsequently picked up by other theologians and commentators throughout the Middle Ages, including, among others, Hilton, her contemporary.⁵⁴ Although theories abound to explain how Julian might have learned something about Augustine’s thought, the question of whether or not she knew his theology, or indeed could have read his works herself, remains unresolved. While she uses his terms “substance” and “sensuality” and appears to draw on Augustine’s arguments about them, she means something slightly different by these terms from what Augustine did. In her thought,

“substance” and “sensuality” place the hypostatic union centrally as a pivot or midpoint of her argument about how humanity is made in the likeness of God.

Augustine proposes interrelated trinities to explain how the human mind works. In his model, one of these trinities consists of higher reason, lower reason, and will or desire. The lower reason functions as a helpmate or assistant to the higher reason in much the same way, Augustine says, as woman was created helpmate for man. Lower reason, he asserts, governs temporal events associated with the active life, including, among others, information channeled to the mind by the senses. The senses themselves have their own, sensual, trinities. While Augustine refers to soul, his primary interest is in how the human mind functions, not in distinguishing between body and soul. “Sensual,” referring to lower reason, does not mean “bodily” except in the limited sense of that part of the mind which receives bodily sensations. The sensations themselves are bodily; the lower reason is not.

In Julian’s discourse, “sensuality” appears to signify something other than one aspect of the mind, sensuality being what Christ transforms to bring about salvation: “And like as we were like made to the Trinite in our first makynge, our maker would that we should be like Iesus Criste our saviour, in hevyn without ende, be the vertue of our geynmakynge” (10.54–56). Julian’s characteristic sensitivity to the polysemy of words is evident here: redemption is both a “gain” for humanity and an “again,” a remaking within humanity. As “geynmaking,” redemption is a restoration in which something is added. Christ’s taking on humanity through the Incarnation enables this redemption, as she makes clear later in her example of the lord and the servant, where Christ and Adam each stand in the same place as servant. In Julian’s view, sensuality—that which is transformed—appears to be humanity’s bodily nature, or, perhaps, fallen nature; sensuality already seems a step closer to bodiliness than it was in Augustine’s usage.⁵⁵ Given that Aristotle was rediscovered in the time between when Augustine wrote in the fourth century and Julian in the fourteenth, her nuancing of the terms perhaps indicates her indebtedness to scholastic philosophy as well as to Augustine.

Could Julian’s substance and sensuality then equate to the more familiar dichotomy of soul and body? This seems unlikely, in part because she uses the terms “soul” and “body” elsewhere and could readily have used them here. She also does not seem to equate “substance” and “sensuality” with the higher and lower parts of the soul, as Augustine had done, despite her confusing wording in chapter fifty-five (“and these ii partes were in Criste, the heyer and the lower, which is but on [one] soule. The heyer [*higher*] part was on in peace

with God in full ioy and bliss; the lower partie, which is sensualite, suffrid for the salvacion of mankynd” [55.52–55]). Here “which is but on soule” appears to refer to Christ, in whom the higher and lower parts, substance and sensuality, are united. In Julian’s thinking, that union in Christ positions him, crucially, as mediator for humankind, because she views human substance as united to God in its creation and sensuality as united to God not in its initial creation but through the Incarnation.⁵⁶ Since the soul is made by God from nothing that is made, the soul is united to God in its creation. The body, however, is not united to God in its creation because it is made from the already created earth. Instead, the body is united to God through the Second Person of the Trinity in the Incarnation. The enclosing of man in God takes place in the process of Creation, while the enclosing of God in man is comprehended in the Incarnation. The distinction is important for her Incarnation-centered theology, in which Christ is the crucial midpoint.

Elsewhere, Julian continues to distinguish between substance and sensuality as she works through her understanding of how God knew and loved mankind from the beginning, without ever ceasing to love, “for er that he mad [made] us he lovid us; and whan we were made we lovid hym” (53.37–38). According to Julian, the differences among unmade, made from nought, and made from something previously made help in thinking about distinctions among God, the soul, and the body. United from the beginning in love, God and man’s soul (but not body) are as close as may be:

And thus I vnderstond that mannys soule is made of nought [nothing], that is to sey, it is made, but of nought that is made, as thus: whan God shuld make mans body he tooke the slyppe of erth, which is a matter medlid [*mingled*] and gaderid of [*gathered* from] all bodily things, and therof he made mannys bodye; but to the makynge of manys soule he wold take ryte nought, but made it. And thus is the kynd [*nature*] made rytefully onyd [*united*, “*one-ed*”] to the maker, which is substantial kynd onmade: that is, God. And therefore it is that ther may, ne shall, be ryte nowte [*nothing*] atwix God and mannys soule. (53.42–50)

Because man’s soul is made from nothing that is made, the soul is united by its nature as substance to God, who is himself unmade. God and the soul both are substance, but God is unmade while the soul is made, although from nothing that is made. The body is also made, from something already made, the slip of the earth. So by nature man’s soul is as close as may be to God. The quality of substance, made or unmade, in both the soul and God is the key to understanding the doubled indwelling of God in the soul and the soul in God:

Our soule is made to be Gods wonyng [*dwelling*] place, and the wonyng place of the soule is God, which is onmade [not *created*]. And hey [high] vnderstondyng it is inwardly to sen and to knowen that God which is our maker wonyth in our soule; and an heyer vnderstondyng it is inwardly to sen and to knowen our soule, that is made, wonyth in

Gods substance; of which substance, God, we arn that we arn. And I saw no difference atwix God and our substance, but as it were al God, and yet myn vnderstandyng toke that our substance is in God: that is to sey, that God is God, and our substance is a creture in God . . . (54.13–22)

When Julian calls “our substance” “a creture in God,” she points to the created nature of the soul.⁵⁷ Here, as she does elsewhere, Julian repeatedly uses the actual word “soule” interchangeably for “substance” when speaking of man. When speaking of God, she uses the generative “substance,” of course, because the Trinity technically does not have a distinct soul, though the Trinity is, as Julian might say, “very substance” or the true substance, the fullest expression of substance.⁵⁸ So, too, when she earlier explains how “prayer onyth the soule to God,” she notes that “thow the soule be ever lyke to God in kynde and substance, restorid be grace, it is often onlyke in condition be synne on manys partye” (43.4–6). Because of the manner of its creation, the soul is like God in its nature and its quality as substance, restored by grace, but is unlike in the condition of man’s sin.

When Julian uses the words “substance” and “sensuality,” then, she indicates that she is thinking philosophically about the relationship between God and man, as Augustine did when he used the word “word.” Perhaps in using these terms with such precision she indicates a stylistic indebtedness to Augustine, as Hilton did with his use of the word “Jhesu.” When her focus is not on the nature of this relationship, however, she speaks plainly of body and soul.⁵⁹ By making this distinction between the technical “substance” and “sensuality” and the more common terms “soul” and “body,” she is able to talk about the unity between enwrapments of the Trinity and man without the distraction of the notion, commonly discussed in her day, of a disunity or conflict between body and soul. In questing after the way in which men and women are made in the image of God, she takes on larger questions about what it means to be human.

Julian’s substance/sensuality duality provides an Incarnational counterpoint to the scholastic dichotomy of substance and accident, and to the bodily/ghostly dichotomy. Her technical discourse demonstrates her careful attention to the nuances of meaning possible when specific words are invested with narrowly defined signification. “Substance” and “sensuality” cue her epistemological discourse on created and uncreated substance, for instance, while the more general terms “body” and “soul” do not so readily highlight precisely how the hypostatic union mediates between humanity and divinity. She perceives Christ as the mediator, finding in him the unifying point that “ones” the soul to God.

Julian’s highly technical discourse might find some readers rather losing the thread of her meaning the further they read. It takes

considerable attention and no small level of interest in her point to remain focused on the philosophical distinction she wants to make between substance and sensuality, particularly because she uses these terms in an idiosyncratic way without specifically defining them in advance. In this respect, we have come back around to the issue of words' referentiality I first raised with Augustine's sign theory, because one challenge of reading Julian's theology on substance and sensuality is to tease out the significance of unfamiliar or novel senses of words. Here, then, is the last issue we must address to round out this chapter: if words as signs point to meaning, how do we know to what meaning they point? In psycholinguistic terms, is the processing of "sense selection" (between known meanings) different from that of "sense creation" (when we encounter new words)? How does sense selection actually work? This issue, obviously, is crucial for writers who wish to engage both sides of John 1:14, language and form. In the phrase, "the Word was made flesh," how do we decide what "word" and "flesh" signify? In Richards's term, what would the tenor of each be? I previously examined this issue by means of the literal and figurative senses of language, then by the bodily and ghostly. In Langland's "figuratyfly," for instance, or Hilton's "savour," the medieval writers who are the subject of this study talk about nonliteral language in ways that suggest they believe sense is added by the form in which such language is expressed. While cognitive scientists are working on this area of language processing today, the actual mechanism for sense selection is not yet understood. In particular, the literary use of nonliteral language has received little attention from cognitive scientists, who have focused instead on conversational discourse.⁶⁰ Some promising areas of research, however, have begun to suggest that the literal/figural dichotomy might not be so binary as previously thought. Polysemy might not be based on an either/or processing of thought.

Underspecification or Hypersignification: A Cognitive Model for Polysemy?

I noted earlier that in the initial chapters of her *Revelation*, well before the philosophical discourse on substance and sensuality, Julian introduced the notion that Christ reforms the soul in its sensuality, to achieve "our geynmaking" (10.56). I called attention to the polysemy of "geynmaking" as both a gain for humanity and an "again," a remaking. While the word "geynmaking" is not a common one—Julian coined it for this use—given the strong parallel structure of

“first makyng . . . geynmaking,” most readers will readily generate a meaning despite the word’s novelty: “And like as we were like made to the Trinite in our first makyng, our maker would that we should be like Iesus Criste our saviour, in hevyn without ende, be the vertue of our geynmakyng” (10.54–56). The pun is, perhaps, a subtle one; the cognitive priming of context (“in our first makyng”) prompts the “again” response more readily than the “gain” one. After a little more thought, though, it is not difficult to arrive at “gain,” largely because of “makyng” itself: when a maker creates well, the positive outcome is a gain. Julian’s pun, which requires her readers to engage in both sense selection and sense creation, is an excellent example of language carrying meaning that is more than the sum of its parts.

If it is true that the figurative sense is a non-normative use of language, as assumed by the “literal-first” model, then it should take longer to process the meaning of figurative language than it does nonfigurative. However, studies increasingly find no meaningful difference in at least the initial processing time for figurative versus literal senses of words.⁶¹ To account for this, Steven Frisson and Martin Pickering have advanced the “underspecification” model for sense selection.⁶² Their model explains only sense selection, not sense creation; it accounts for how we choose among meanings we have seen before, not how we make meaning for novel metaphors, for instance. According to the “underspecification” model, when a reader encounters a word whose signification is not immediately clear, where multiple senses (whether literal or figurative) are possible, the processor enables a sort of placeholder sense that accommodates all known possibilities by abstracting a sort of common denominator, until further context winnows out nonqualified meanings. As Frisson and Pickering put it, “when a word with multiple senses is encountered, there is no immediate activation of a single fully specified sense. . . . If preceding context helps determine which sense is appropriate, then the processor may home in fairly rapidly. If preceding context is neutral with respect to the different senses, then the processor may delay deciding which sense to adopt.”⁶³

So the underspecified sense is not any usual sense of the word; it is neither, for instance, “the literal” nor the most commonly encountered sense. It abstracts known senses, so it is both underdetermined and underspecified.⁶⁴ While more work remains to be done on this promising model, it attractively suggests two things: first, an explanation for the mechanism by which polysemy works so beautifully, as in Julian’s “poynte” and Langland’s “figuratyfly”; second, that writers who leave multiple possibilities simultaneously in play essentially transcribe to the page an aspect of cognitive processing we perform naturally and well. Intriguingly, if the

underspecified model is correct, it aligns conceptually with the culmination of Augustine's thinking on the word "word." His concept of the "true word" which is "formable and not yet formed" sounds much like the underspecification model, with the added component that Augustine's word, through the process of thought, arrives at an underlying truth present in the true language that exists, in his view, in the mind (however, Frisson and Pickering, like most scholars of cognition today, make no neo-Platonic claims about inherent truth, in thought, that aligns with the divine mind): What is that which can be a word, and, therefore, is already worthy of the name of a word? What, I say, is this word, formable and not yet formed, except something of our own mind which we cast this way and that by a kind of revolving motion, according as we think now of this and now of that thing, just as they are found, or as they occur to our mind? And it then becomes a true word when that which we cast, as I have said, by a revolving motion, arrives at that which we know, and is formed by it by taking its perfect likeness, so that as any thing is known, so it is also thought, so it is spoken in the heart, that is, without sound, without the thought of sound, such as certainly belongs to some language. (15.15.25)

What neither Augustine's revolving of the true word nor the underspecification model accounts for is sense creation itself. This area of language processing is also not well understood. It is of special interest where the line between new senses and existing senses can be very difficult to draw, such as in polysemy or innovative metaphor. Here, as in other areas of language processing, context appears to be key, in part because readers or listeners have no advance notice about whether or not any given word or expression will be used in a novel sense; they receive and attempt to process all language as it comes.⁶⁵ Frisson and Pickering suggest that sense creation may develop out of the initial underspecified meaning.⁶⁶ Cognitive "priming" prepares a language processor to make connections between two linguistic domains; the response to a second prompt linking those two domains will be quicker than the first. For instance, one study that primed subjects to link politicians with types of ships by introducing the novel metaphor "Richard Nixon is the submarine of world leaders" indicated that these subjects were more likely to associate "Arafat" with "pirate ship" than were subjects who were not so primed.⁶⁷ Such lines of research lead to the larger claims scholars are making today about the nature of metaphor itself. Rather than thinking about associative links prompted by the semantics of polysemous words only, cognitive theorists are generating new models based on cognitive frameworks established by such priming. In this way of thinking, metaphor offers

opportunities for coherence in texts. Far from being ornamental, or adding sense in a localized way, metaphor is seen as a basis for form within thought itself. To take one example, in the following description of how cognitive frameworks (here called “metaphor-based schemas”) function in language, we find that in this model, metaphor helps to contextualize relationships among cognitive domains, beyond the semantic level:

The priming results found by Allbritton et al. [“Metaphor-Based Schemas and Text Representations”] indicate that metaphor-based schemas can be used as a basis for relating and connecting pieces of information in a text representation, in a way that simple semantic associations do not account for. Thus, metaphor has been shown to be a possible source of increased coherence in text representations, by providing a means for tying together some of the ideas in a text. In this way, metaphor may play an important role in the comprehension not only of figurative language, but of discourse in general.⁶⁸

Although Allbritton’s point is not a theological one, the concept of “[relation] in a text representation” offers a tempting way to talk about “the Word made flesh.” Not everyone would agree that metaphor offers “increased coherence” over nonmetaphorical language. In any case, Albritton’s view of language has moved to the very edge of doing away with such a thing as nonmetaphorical language in the first place. The challenge of trying to understand that which cannot be expressed gains a cognitive dimension, much as Augustine had envisioned, and as fourteenth-century writers envision, although their understanding of that cognitive component carries a theological component not shared, perhaps, by modern cognitive scientists.

Several of the writers who are the subject of this study ground that seeking in the Pauline enigma that promises a future revelation of what can now be known only in part. Their search, then, finds its way through charity as expressed in 1 Cor. 13. In context, Langland’s use of “figuratively” implies a glancing blow at the friars or other clergy, who may mirror Christ as a dim reflection of divine reality, either because they are only human or because they are less devout than they ought to be. By substituting “figuratively,” which may have its own source in Augustine’s Incarnational language theory, for the more pictorial “in a mirror,” Langland points towards figural language as a key component in the search for a clear view of God. Like Langland, in the final epigraph to this chapter, Hilton specifically advocates seeking an understanding of God through the incarnate Christ: in this case, not in the flesh, standing before us, but through language (specifically here, scriptural language—the word of God), which offers one means toward understanding Christ’s humanity: “This is oo [one] maner sight of Jhesu, as I seide bifore: not as He is, but clothed undir likenesse of werkes and of wordes, *per speculum in enigmate* (1 Cor. 13:12), bi a

myrore and likenesse, as the apostil seith" (2.43.3372–74).

How can works and words clothe "bi a myrore and likenesse"? What sort of sight is this, if one can see in this fashion? From the issue of language's signification, we must move to the issue of concrete and abstract. Was Will looking for Charity itself or for a charitable person—any charitable person? Langland offers the simultaneous possibility of both, a simultaneity that encourages us to think separately through the ramifications of each. Whether we settle on the abstract quality or the concrete person, or hold both in mind, or enable some underspecified meaning, the ultimate tenor of that search must be contingent on what he thinks constitutes the epitome of charity, or true love.

Chapter 2

Elisions of Abstract and Concrete, Epitomized in a “True-love”

In a valey of this restles mynde,
I soughte in mounteyne and in mede,
Trustyng a trewelove for to fynde
—“In a Valley of This Restless Mind,” 1–3

And al þat mark hath ymade, Matheu, Ion and lucas
Of thy douhtiokest dedes was don in oure sekte:
Verbum caro factum est.
—*Piers Plowman*, 7.139–40a ~ B 5.499–500a

. . . also by the curtes geft of his Fader we be his blis, we be his mede, we be
his worshippe, we be his corone—and this was a singular mervel and a full
delectable beholdyng, that we be his corone.
—*A Revelation*, 22.23–26

EARLIER I NOTED how Julian, Hilton, and the Cloud-author distinguish between “bodily” and “ghostly” interpretations of language, with the *Cloud*-author’s “bodely conseyte of a goostly þing, or elles a goostly conseyte of a bodely þing,” Julian’s “gostly weping,” and Hilton’s explanation how to “turne lightli inowgh alle sich wordes of bodili thyngis into goostli undirstondyng.” They point towards spiritual understanding by means of analogy with a physical experience of the material world. Ironically, that spiritual understanding must be represented in concrete terms precisely because the very nature of its subject matter is highly abstract. This chapter investigates what happens when writers want both senses simultaneously in play, as is the case in “the Word made flesh,” where “Word” carries heightened abstract potential compared to the relatively concrete “flesh.” In the second and third epigraphs, Langland’s treatment of “sekte” and Julian’s “we be his corone,” the materiality of the concrete component of the metaphor (clothing or enwrapment) contrasts sharply with the immateriality of the nature of humanity (embodied existence) and ultimately the divine aspect of Christ himself. At the same time, the materiality of Christ’s body is concretely reified as something other than a human body. That interplay of concrete and abstract centered

on the materiality of Christ's body draws attention to the challenge of comprehending the nature of the hypostatic union, God and man together in one person. This chapter also is concerned with what happens when a word or phrase describing an abstract concept is given a certain concreteness within the text: such a compressed interplay between concrete and abstract is central to *not* perceiving "the Word made flesh" as a metaphor, for example.

This technique of making the abstract concrete in order to highlight the abstract is fundamental to the effectiveness of the "true love" metaphor of the first epigraph. What is a "trewelove"? Given that the "I" of the poem seeks it in mountains, meadows, and valleys, does "a trewelove" sound more like a concept (the epitome of love), a person (my true love!) or a plant (the true-love)?¹ For fourteenth-century readers, all three of these are likely to be true readings, even simultaneously true ones. Equally, two aspects of love are potentially in play: sexual, desiring love (*eros*), and the salvific love of God and neighbor (*caritas*).² While the polysemous term "true love" may occur in secular (as opposed to sacred) contexts, "true love" bears Christological associations based in exegetical commentary on the Song of Songs and centered on the body of Christ, as I have argued elsewhere.³ The delicious ambiguity of the first epigraph raises another question: if "I" seek "a trewelove" in a valley of "this" restless mind, whose mind is "this"? The speaker's, presumably, although a neo-Platonic interpretation could argue that the mind is God's, surrounding and encompassing and comprehending all. Even more interestingly, the mind could be the reader's, puzzling through meanings to arrive at the sought thing, "trewelove," Christ himself. What, then, is "a trewelove"? Part of the pleasure of reading "In a Valley of This Restless Mind" is gained from sustaining all three possibilities (concept, person, plant) simultaneously in mind, in both sacred and secular senses. For that effect, the poet relies on the interplay of concrete and abstract maintained in a state of tension. The vernacular English name for the true-love plant ("true love") offers a useful catch-title for this chapter because it encapsulates the organic and rich ambiguity of significance that can result from compressing the concrete and the abstract, the material and the immaterial. My focus in this chapter is on that compression, which in an Incarnational poetic both represents and explores the nature of the hypostatic union on the page, enabling supereffability in Christological and, in some cases, specifically Incarnational contexts. The rich ambiguity of the "true-love" thus provides a jumping-off point for this aspect of an Incarnational poetic.

Truelove: Christ and Salvation

In English and in England, the true-love is a plant. Both “true” and “love” offer attractive potential for poets interested in the Incarnation, possibilities that do not inhere in the Latin name for the plant, “*quadrifolia*,” or in its other English names. An early fifteenth-century macaronic sermon makes the play of meaning in the name of the true-love plant abundantly clear; here, the plant is first named in the English vernacular as “trewloue,” then backtranslated from English into Latin as “*fidelis amor*” rather than its proper Latin name, “*quadrifolia*,” presumably to underline the preacher’s didactic message about the concepts of truth and love:⁴

Et oportet quod de corde isto procedat vnum **trewloue**: itaque diligas eum ex toto corde et perseueranter, quia diligere eum hodie et cras derelinquere nichil valet. Quatuor folia istius *fidelis amoris* sunt dileccio Dei super omnia, dileccio proximi, dileccio animi siue anime tue, et dileccio inimici.

And from the heart a **trewlove** must come forth; you must love him with your whole heart and with perseverance, for to love him today and to leave him tomorrow is worthless. The four leaves of this *trewlove* are the love of God above all things, the love of your neighbor, the love for your own soul, and the love of your enemy.⁵

Here the preacher has not needed to explain that a true-love is a plant; he evidently expects that the true-love is familiar enough to his contemporaries that he can wait for several clauses before explicitly shifting the metaphor to the botanical realm with “four leaves.” Nevertheless, his syntax cues the interpretation of “trewlove” as a plant more strongly than does “In a Valley of This Restless Mind”; it would be hard to substitute “from the heart a lover must come forth” or “from the heart a concept-of-faithful-love must come forth.” The preacher evidently feels he can draw on the Truelove tradition with only the briefest of outlines. To elucidate the Incarnational significance of the true-love, I shall begin by sketching the plant’s place in existing traditions drawn on by fourteenth-century writers, before moving to Incarnational examples.

Writers familiar with the Truelove tradition capitalize on the ambiguity inherent in the plant name “true-love” to slide from an abstract reference into the concrete botanical context or (more frequently) from the specificity of the true-love plant with its mnemonic or enumerative potential to a broader range of meanings. In devotional contexts, in particular, the signification of the words “true love” may be ambiguous: from Christ, as the supreme example of charity (particularly the crucified Saviour—the earliest known name for the plant is “*crux Christi*”); to Mary, who both exemplifies and carried within her body “true love,” God incarnate; to divine love

abstractly conceived; to salvation in general.⁶ When context clearly reinforces a botanical reading, “true love” may be described as a prized object to be sought or that may be found repeatedly and reliably once one knows where to look: a plentiful, recurring, generative, medicinal or curative power.⁷ Puns on “grace/grass” (herb, merciful attention, medicine, favor) or “vertue” (favorable quality, power, medicine, manliness) may carry sexualized overtones. Where Truelove poems intersect with the topos of Christ as lover-knight, the shading over from earthly to divine lover may take on especially lyrical or mystical qualities, sometimes within a *chanson d’aventure* framework.⁸

A poem of this sort is the one with which this chapter began, the lyric poem “In a Valley of This Restless Mind.” This poem sets *eros* and *caritas* alongside one another, drawing heavily from the Song of Songs and courtly love poetry for its imagery. As my brief examination of its opening lines suggests, the poem also generates wordplay based in paradoxes and polysemy. In the following example, the intimacy between Christ (“I am Truelove that fals was nevere” [17]) and “Mannis Soule” (18) is imagined as both maternalistic and erotic.⁹ Christ the lover-knight/mother/“Truelove” cries:

My love is in ~~hich~~ chaumbir. Holde youre pees!

Make ye no noise, but lete hir slepe.

My babe Y wolde not were in disese;

I may not heere my dere child wepe;

With my pap Y schal hir kepe.

Ne merveille ye not though Y tende hir to:

This hole in my side had nevere be so depe,

But *quia amore langueo*. (105–12)¹⁰

*I would not desire were
hear
breast*

except because I languish for love

The Latin tag, “because I languish for love” (Cant. 2:5, 5:8) repeatedly resounds in Truelove poems; it is also the base text for the sermon I quoted earlier. The poet begins this passage with the notion of Christ as lover, whose address to an unspecified third party (the “ye” of the poem, here closely identified with the reader) demonstrates tender, protective concern for the beloved resting in her bedchamber (with all the sexual promise that space entails). With lyrical ease, the poet shifts to Christ’s maternal concern for the sleeping child at rest, a nurturing attention that leads naturally to caring for the beloved’s well-being in both body and soul. The pun on “disese” (107) points in two directions: toward a desire for soul-quieting rest with its eschatological implications (not “dis-ease”) and body-healing repose that encourages health in a growing child (not “disease”). Christ protectively nurtures the soul with mother’s milk, an effluence the poet then mystically links to the outpouring of blood from the wound in Christ’s side (109–11). The wound is paradoxically imagined as

another protective and even medicinal space carved out because of the lover's ardent and anguished attentions ("because I languish for love"); indeed, by implication, the wound is another chamber for repose large enough for the soul or even, as Julian of Norwich puts it, "large enow [*enough*] for al mankynd that shal be save [*saved*] to resten in pece and in love" (24.6–7). To prompt a deeper understanding of the all-encompassing and reliable love that in his view God both feels and is, the poet relies on the cumulative power of a series of paradoxes: how can your male-gendered lover also be your mother? How can a male body carry female attributes without being hermaphroditic? What can be medicinal about a life-threatening wound? How can a source of pain be a site of protection? While much of the imagery here is common to medieval writing influenced by the Song of Songs, the personification of true love in a narrative context works particularly well, in this instance, through its appeal to affect, an appeal made effective here by dialogue drawing on secular life-situations many or most people have themselves experienced. Indeed, one of the more intriguing aspects of the Truelove tradition centers on the elision between sacred and secular imagery. As Douglas Gray has remarked in another context:

Sometimes there is a simple transference from one tradition to another, which is occasionally so complete that we are hard put to decide whether a poem is "secular" or "religious"—one poem which begins

Trelove trewe on you I truste,
Evermore to fynde you perseverawnt,
Ellys wolde my herte yn sondir brest,
Bot I cowde love yn expyrant.

*perseverant
or else; burst
dying*

might well be called a secular lyric, if it were not for the rubric that accompanies it in the manuscript: "querimonia Christi languentis pro amore."¹¹

For those familiar with Truelove poems and the lover-knight motif, the lover's reproachful reference to his heart bursting in two would be enough to suggest that the speaker is Christ, even in the absence of the explicit connection to the Song of Songs indicated by the Latin rubric. Gray's example usefully demonstrates how the mapping of one tradition onto another allows a sort of no-man's-land where both readings—sacred and secular—work equally well, where the ingenuity that capitalizes on intended ambiguity adds pleasure for those who recognize the sacred meaning.

Similarly, a poem from the preaching manual Harley 7322 further shows that resonances of the true-love's botanical context may carry through in situations where the plant is not clearly indicated:

bey loue be strong *and bouyng, freuynth (might)*
for wele, for wo, trewloue mat lith.

joy; heals

treuloue is large, fre & hende
& loue 3if alleping blepeli to his frende.

*generous, noble and courteous
gives; blithely, happily*

in wele & wo, loue stondit faste,
for lif, for det, trewloue wil laste.

*stands
death*

fer & frey loue hat on heu
for trewloue is fress & eure neu.¹²

*fair and courteous; has one color/form/appearance (hue)
new*

For readers versed in the Truelove tradition, this poem works by gradually wakening recognition that culminates in lines that suggest the true-love plant continuously and generously replicating itself widely in a landscape, a common feature of Truelove poems. In “In a Valley of This Restless Mind,” for instance, the speaker situates the encounter with Christ within an interior landscape, within the self, as in the first epigraph to this chapter:

In a valey of this restles mynde,
I soughte in mounteyne and in mede,
Trustynge a trelouue for to fynde (1–3)

Seeking in a meadow, where we might expect to find plants propitious for love, precipitates the speaker’s finding of the man who identifies himself as “Truelove that fals was nereve” (17). Further imagery in the poem locates the site of the “trelouue” the speaker hopes to find (3) within the *locus amoenus* (the fair and delectable place) from the Song of Songs as well as within the speaker’s mind. In the Harley 7322 lyric, the meadow where flowers grow is implied by the singular and constant appearance of the “trewloue” (“hat on heu,” 7), its abundance, and the freshness and regenerative quality of its growth. The notion of love persevering through life and death (5–6) suggests either Christ’s victory or Mary’s steadfast vigil at the foot of the Cross, a subject common in Marian Truelove poems. The previous stanza tips the scales towards a Christological rather than a Marian reading: the generosity and courtliness of the “treuloue” (3) suits the Christ-knight motif, as does the first stanza’s emphasis on strength and power. Poems of this sort rely in part on our inability to decide definitively what is meant by “true love”; their strongest effect is achieved by simultaneously holding in mind resonances of multiple possible readings, particularly where varied readings are equally tenable but coexist in some state of tension.¹³ The tension sustained by the Truelove tradition is also generated, in part, by the interplay of concrete and abstract: the materiality of a four-leaved plant, the immateriality of love or salvation. Both personification and reification are in play, in equal parts that vie for salience: the personification of

abstract love, the reification of Christ as the true-love plant.

The two-way pull of personification and reification plays an important role in the “Long Charter of Christ,” a poem of special interest because it combines all three image groups I track in this study (*book, text, or language; cloth, clothing, or enwrapment; plant, growth, or life force*): Christ’s body is the text and parchment of a charter of salvation, as well as the coat of arms that proclaims him to be lord of a certain property, humanity. The place to seek a true-love is in his side wound. I will consider the first two image groups in my third chapter, focusing here only on the botanical “true love.”

In some Truelove poems, the plant’s physical form serves as a convenient mnemonic: for the stages of penitence, or for remembering the nature of the Trinity, or for other such concepts that can be enumerated on the leaves.¹⁴ The leaves are used this way in the “Long Charter,” for instance, where Christ deeds over to mankind the gift of eternal life in heaven. This poem offers an abbreviated version of Christ’s life, narrated by him from the Cross, as a way of telling salvation history from the Creation to the end of time. The true-love’s leaves become a mnemonic for the stages of proper penitence (in the charter trope, the rent Christ reserves for himself):¹⁵

will I/do I desire to

No more wole I aske of þe
But a four leued gras to 3elde me
That on lef is opon shryft
That oþer thin herte to smerte skyft
The tridde I wole namore don so
The ferde drede god euermo
Whan þuse leues to gydere ben set
A trewe loue men clepon it
Of this rente be not be hynde
ffor thor3 þe 3er þou may it fynde
Or elles seche it in my wounde
ffor pere may trewe loue ben founde

*four-leaved herb (“true-love”); yield
first leaf open confession
second; to cause to suffer
third; never more
fourth; fear
together
call

year
seek*

The plant, initially referred to by its more generalized Middle English name, “four leued gras,” is introduced as an aid for remembering the stages of penitence; its further resonances become important after it has been named with more specificity (“A trewe loue men clepon it”). This naming makes possible the richness of meaning that moves it beyond a four-leaved, plentifully abundant plant: the admonition to “seche it in my wounde” no longer refers primarily to the true-love, a plant growing in a field, but rather to the indwelling of the soul characteristic of medieval exegesis of the Song of Songs, such as we saw in “In a Valley of This Restless Mind.” By a sort of elision of “trewe loue” and the wound in which it may be found, “true love” itself comes to have a referential link on this level to the body of the

suffering Christ, wounded for love, or “*quia amore langueo*” (“because I languish for love”). Here is the logical extension of the imagery we saw begun in “In a Valley of This Restless Mind”: the wound is now bedchamber and meadow, an expansive site of both pleasure and rest, the *locus amoenus* (“fair and delectable place”) associated with the enclosed garden of the Song of Songs.¹⁶ Even where understated, the botanical link between “true love” and wound as an expression of love enables those who know the tradition to rediscover the link, as a fifteenth-century example attests:

Hayle precius ♡ wounded so large and wyde
 Hayle trusty treuloue our joy to provide

Although the medieval original for this poem, William Billyng’s meditation on the Five Wounds, has not survived, the corresponding illumination for this verse apparently included a four-leaved plant springing from the wounded heart.¹⁷

By comparison with the “Long Charter,” in the lyric poem “Loue that god loueth” the true-love plant is explicitly associated with the body of Christ, leading similarly to a numbering of the leaves, in this case the wounded hands and feet of the crucified Christ (“His handes and feet, þe leues were; / His herte was wiþ a spere þurgh-shoue [*shoved through*]” [188–89]).¹⁸ Here, however, the enumeration is not mnemonic. The poet emphasizes the plant’s medicinal properties (“What soule is syk, lay þat herbe aboue, / Hit makeþ hool [*whole*] al y-fere [*altogether*]” [191–92]), continuing to extend the advice, repeated in various ways throughout the poem, that one should seek one’s own advantage, in this case by applying true love (the wounds of Christ) as if it were a poultice.

In Truelove poems, then, the deliberate interplay of concrete and abstract can lead to a specialized Christological statement of God’s love for humanity, drawing attention to the physicality of Christ’s body and of the leaves of the true-love plant at the same time as the poems make use of abstractions associatively linked to that body. Personification and reification work jointly, in a state of tension. The pleasingness of the complex reading process required to recognize God at the center of true love becomes very much the point in every sense of the word: the term true love, insofar as it resolves, offers an emotive entrance toward an understanding of the complex nature of God’s humanity and of God’s love, pointing the way inward, as it were.

Flexible ways of thinking about Christ’s body emphasize the compression of divinity and humanity in the hypostatic union, putting special emphasis on the nature of personhood: both the doctrine that explains the Trinity (one God in three Persons) and the nature of

humanity (a person among other persons).¹⁹ A similar interplay between concrete and abstract in some botanical lyrics enables a near-but-not-complete elision of persons highlighting Christ's lineage and the Incarnation's role in salvation. As in "In a Valley of this Restless Mind," the imagery is organic in several senses, linking salvation with nourishment and maternal care, and adding to that mix the topic of Christ's lineage. In "Mary, the Rose-Bush," for instance, Mary and Jesus are described as blossoms or branches of one bush, an image perhaps related to the Jesse tree, a common iconographical illustration of Christ's lineage based on Isaiah 11:1 ("And there shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse, and a flower shall rise up out of his root"):²⁰

Of a rose, a louely rose,
Of a rose I syng a song.

~~kyng and dyskyng~~ both old and yying,
How the rose begane to spryng;
A fayyrer rose to owr lekyng
Sprong ther neuer in kynges lond.

liking

v branchis of that rose ther ben,
The wyche ben both feyer and chene;
Of a maydyn, Mary, hevyn quene,
Ovght of hyr bosum the branch sprong.

*five
which; fair; beautiful*

out

The [first] branch was of gret honour:
That blyssed Mary shuld ber the flour, . . . (1–12)²¹

Mary here appears to occupy the place normally held by Jesse: the root or perhaps trunk. The bodily focus on generation parallels the emanative topos of the leaps of Christ; that topos is the poem's organizing principle.²² The rose that "begins to spring" in line 4 is difficult to define but the qualifier "begane" is particularly important: this springing is the first of a series, the one that sets the other in motion. That "rose" conjoins Mary's and Jesus's actions in bringing about salvation: the five springings of the bush come at the Annunciation, Nativity, Visitation of the Magi, Harrowing of Hell, and Ascension. Although Mary is frequently called a rose in devotional poetry, in this context the simple equation of "rose" and "Mary" does not ring true; moreover, the last two springings of the branch shift decisively from the Marian realm.²³

The same elision of persons occurs in the fourteenth-century Vernon refrain lyric "Flourdelys," again in the context of the leaps of Christ. In this passage, Mary and Jesus appear to be blossoms on one lily plant. Initially, they are compared to a prized flower, the fleur-de-lys; the complexity and compression of these lines is typical of this

þat ~~flourde~~^{floure} ~~lyf~~^{lefe} floure þeore fair to fynde,

splendid

what gome wolde go . þer-as hit greu3

man; grew

.....

What segge on soil . þat þat seed seu3

man; sowed²⁵

Hit is holy . at myn a-vys

it; in my opinion

Aboue þe Braunches . þeþ Blossmes neu

þe lele cheses fair . þe Flourdelys.

the faithful one courteously chooses

þou lele ladi . I likne to þe

faithful; compare

þe flour . to þi semeli sone also

beautiful

þe blisful Blossme . þat euer mihte be

most praiseworthy

Treuly þat was . be-twix þou to (9–20)

you two²⁶

At this stage of the poem the poet has not explicitly stated that Mary and Jesus are in fact flowers on the same bush; as the poem progresses, however, the identification of “Flourdelys” with Christ, or with salvation, or with Christ as the means of salvation, emerges. Mary’s status as flower is less definitive than in “Rose-Bush” but the opening stanzas suggest a similar conceit: two flowers, both excellent, springing from the same bush.²⁷ There is no simple, one-to-one identification of concrete image (“fleur-de-lys”) with abstract concept (excellence, or human and divine lineage conjoined in hypostatic union, or salvation). As with “true love,” the very ambiguity of signification allows a variety of abstract possibilities to remain simultaneously in play, based on the single concrete botanical prompt. Unlike “true love,” however, in the case of “fleur-de-lys” the plurality of signification stems from symbolic associations set up within the poem itself, rather than from the polysemy of the plant’s name.

In these botanical lyrics, the joint treatment of Mary and Jesus leaves the abstract signified of the concrete signifier, rose or fleur-de-lys, somewhat ambiguous, while by no means obscuring a clear distinction between the two as individuated persons. Unlike the true-love plant, the names “rose” and “fleurde-lys” do not contribute linguistically to the potential for polysemy in that ambiguity. What happens, then, when words themselves point up important aspects of a different jointure that furthers salvation, the hypostatic union of God and man?

Polysemy: *Secte* and *Sute* in *Piers Plowman*

The words “secte” and “sute,” as Langland uses them, are richly ambiguous.²⁸ Each implies a specific connection between the incarnate

Christ and humanity, even where the meaning of that connection is, in Frisson and Pickering's term, underspecified.²⁹ For both "secte" and "sute," the connection hinges on the nature of the hypostatic union as imagined in material terms (with reference to Christ's body) and immaterial ones (the relationship of Christ to humanity). The passage of interest occurs in Repentance's prayer on behalf of those who desire to undertake the pilgrimage to St. Truth, and includes an explicit invocation, in Latin, of John 1:14 ("*Verbum caro factum est*"; "the Word was made flesh[, and dwelt among us]").³⁰ A portion of the passage appears as the second epigraph to this chapter:

~~And~~ *And* god al þat mark hath ymade, Matheu, Ion and lucas

Of thy douhtiokest dedes was don in oure sekte:

Verbum caro factum est. (*Piers Plowman*, 7.139–40a ~ B 5.499–500a)

most valiant; "sect"

The differences between the B and C versions of this scene are extensive and significant, bearing as they do on the way Langland investigates Christ's humanity through a complex range of associations he draws in through two key words, "secte" and "sute." To understand the role these words play in the prayer, it will be helpful to look initially at two passages that touch on a central and much-discussed issue of the poem, the problem of poverty.³¹ The first is Need's brief recounting of the Incarnation. In the second, Patience links poverty with sloth by means of the word "secte," and probably by "sute" as well. Sloth is the last of the sins to confess immediately before Repentance's prayer, so even though Patience's discourse comes much later in the narrative, in several ways it provides important context for interpreting Repentance's "secte" and "sute" passage.

One important concern of the poem's internal debate over poverty is this: should an almsgiver distinguish between those who could work but deliberately choose not to and those who legitimately cannot? And if so, how? Toward the end of the poem, consideration of this issue results in the stark simplicity of Need's kenotic retelling of the Incarnation:

And god al his grete ioye goestliche he lefte

And cam and toek mankynde and bicam nedy (22.40–41)

If Christ voluntarily chose poverty, might the poor merit special consideration from those who do not lack the necessities? Need comes to advocate a self-interested interpretation of the axiom, "God helps those who help themselves"; according to Need, the poor may legitimately steal the necessities when their life hangs in the balance.³²

Patience takes up the problem of poverty from another angle: sloth is a trap for the poor, he says, because the poor might assume they should rely on God's providence rather than helping themselves by

working when they are able. He says this at dinner at Conscience's house, a meal to which he was invited only because he was begging for food or money "*pur charite*" [for charity] (15.32–35). He reframes, then, the problem of 1 Cor. 13 with which I began Chapter 1: what is the nature of charity and how can one find the likeness of God in humanity? This passage comes in close proximity to the passage I examined in Chapter 1 for Langland's use of "*figuratyfly*" (16.286–97). Patience's argument relies on the keywords "*secte*" and "*sute*"; the poor man is not only God's servant, imitating Christ's servitude, but also his brother in the cloth, perhaps a member of the same religious order:

And thow sleueth ~~the fellow povertie~~ and serue nat god

to paye

Meschief is ay a mene and maketh hym to thenke

That god is his gretteste helpe and no gome elles

And he his seruant, as he saith, and of his [seute/secte] bothe.³³

And where he be or be nat, a bereth þe signe of pouerte

And in þat secte oure saueour saued al mankynde.³⁴

(16.94–99 ~ B.14.254–59)

*Misfortune/Deprivation; go-between
man*

whether; he bears

On close examination, this passage conceals a number of subtleties that preclude an exact paraphrase. "Although Sloth follows poverty, and does not serve God to his pleasure [with pun on '*serue*': 'does not serve God as it would please God to be served' but also 'is not suitable for pleasing God'], Deprivation is always a go-between and reminds him [i.e., the poor man] that God and no one else is his greatest help, and he [the poor man] says that he is God's servant, and also that he is of his '*secte*' [probably, '*sute*'], and whether he is or he is not, he bears the sign of poverty, and in that '*secte*' our Saviour saved all mankind." While I have translated "*Meschief*" here as "Deprivation," the reading "Misfortune" is equally plausible. The act of translation forces a choice that eliminates an important ambiguity: is Patience here describing all poor men ("Deprivation") or only the deserving poor ("Misfortune")? A general diffusion of agency also brings into being a representative "poor man" who is never mentioned directly in the text.³⁵ Standing alone, this passage would suggest that "*secte*" defines a group, certainly poor and perhaps an organized religious order, whose members can be identified visually by some sign, possibly heraldic or based in livery—in this case probably their clothing, or religious habit.

To return to Repentance's sermon, then: Christ's humanity becomes a central focus of Repentance's prayer, which acknowledges a strong linkage between humanity in the Creation ("of nauhte madest auhte and man liche thysulue" [from nothing made everything, and man in your likeness], 7.123), the Fall ("a sykenesse to vs alle,"

7.124), the Incarnation (“bican man of a mayde mankynde to amende,” 7.127), the Crucifixion (“in oure secte, as hit semed, deyedest,” 7.129), the Harrowing of Hell (“Feddest tho with thy fresshe blood oure forfadres in helle,” 7.133), and, reiterated, the Incarnation (“*Verbum caro factum est*” 7.140a). Scholars have generally tended to regard “sute” and “secte” as interchangeable, or at least to note that both carry similar meanings: clothing that distinguishes a group who dress alike or the members of such a group, a legal plea or the parties to a plea, and a group following a leader, with “secte” including the additional sense of a particular religious order or movement.³⁶ In the full passage below, with the comparable passage from the B-text, substantive changes between the two versions are indicated by underscorings. I have emphasized the phrase “in oure secte” in C, with its corresponding phrases “in oure sute”/“in oure secte,” “in oure sute,” and “in oure armes” in B. Note that whatever the literal meaning of the word “secte” might be, its triple repetition in C draws attention to Christ’s actions in the flesh, to this enigmatic way of describing Christ’s body:

Y shall ~~the~~ the ~~seke~~ seke for alle synfulle ~~lowere~~
 Sauenur off grace
 To amende ~~us~~ us of oure mysdeedes; douner cyt to vs alle,
 God þat bi þi goodnesse gonme þe world to make,
 And of nauþer made staȝt and namand biȝt iȝt to þis lue,
 And siþþa suffrestest hym to synge, as iȝhesse to to alle,
 And for þe beste, as lyblyche whateuer þe bodetelle þe:
O felix culpa, o necessarium peccatum Ade. &c.
 For þat synne þis onnesent was to til þe
 And bican man of a mayde mankynde to amende
 And madest þis self wiþ þi sonȝ vnsynfulle slyt &
Ego in p[ro]p[ri]o p[ar]te p[ar]it[ur] ymagine[m] q[ua]m similitudine[m] t[ra]ns[po]sum meum &c; 38
Et alibi, Qui manet in caritate in deo manet & deus in eo. 40
 And siþþe in þis sute, as in some dede dedest
 On goddaiȝt þat fowme of n[atu]re aske dede t[hu]m so þe day;
 Ther þiself ne þi sone no sorwe in deþ feledest,
 But in oure secte was þe sorwe, and þi sone it ladde:
Captiuam duxit captiuitatem. 41

 The þridde day þat offer þow ~~thou~~ thou in oure sute;
 A synful Marie þe seiȝar synnen Marie þi dame,
 And al to solace synfulle þow suffrestest t[hu]m sorwe:
Non veni vocare iustos set peccatores & penitenciam.
 And al þat Mark hath ymade, Mahtew, to man thilucas
 Of þyn ~~olde~~ olde ~~toles~~ toles wascom in oure sutes:
Verbum caro factum est. & habitavit in nobis.
 (B 3.428-500a)

C here surely strives for greater clarity on a number of points. For instance, the B passage could be misconstrued to imply that God himself became sinful in taking human nature: “And madest þiself wiþ þi sone vs synfulle yliche,” “and made yourself and your Son alike to

us sinful people,” rather than “and made yourself, through your Son, alike to us sinful people,” which would benefit from a further qualification, “though not himself sinful.” The C passage specifies in what respect God becomes like man: “And madest thysulue with thy sone oure soule & body ilych,” “like us in soul and body,” or incarnate. The Latin quotations immediately following these lines demonstrate similar concerns: in B, two similitudes are drawn between God and man: man created in the image and likeness of God, and charity as a state of mutual indwelling, “who abides in charity abides in God, and God in him.” The C passage, however, emphasizes seeing Christ, in his humanity, as an expression of God the Father: “I am in the Father, and the Father is in me, and who sees me, sees the Father.” C clarifies the properties of the hypostatic union and focuses on the incarnate Christ.

Elsewhere, B has difficulties in explaining that the divine aspect of the Second Person did not actually die. Line 489, “Ther þiself ne þi sone no sorwe in deep feledest,” cannot mean “did not die at all,” since line 487 explicitly denotes a death: “wiþ þi selue sone in oure sute deidest,” “with your own son died in our ‘sute’.” Instead, “sorwe” seems to denote that aspect of the experience of death that results from sin.⁴³ These potential ambiguities are streamlined in C into the qualification “in oure secte, as hit semed, deyedest,” “in our sect, died, as it seemed.” In B, Christ’s human suffering is compassed by the phrase “oure secte”: “But in oure secte was þe sorwe, and þi sone it ladde,” “sorrow was in our sect, and your Son led it [the sect].” However, this could problematically be taken to mean that the Son did not himself feel sorrow. C drops the difficult “oure secte” for the more direct “fourme of man”: “On a friday in fourme of man feledest our sorwe.” Again, C more precisely centers on the hypostatic union, locating sorrow as a passion shared by humanity and the Second Person of the Trinity, although in the process C loses the lovely line “But in oure secte was þe sorwe, and þi sone it ladde,” rich with the suggestion of all four meanings of secte: clothing, law suit, group of followers, and the church. Note also that in line 130, the alliteration stresses incarnate “fourme”: “On a friday in fourme of man feledest our sorwe.”

I will not pause here to unpack the various implications of “in oure sekte” in lines 136 and 140 of C, beyond noting that the triple repetition draws attention to the phrase, whereas the B passage rings a series of changes on it. I am not entirely convinced that “sekte” and “sute” should be considered synonymous expressions, especially since all pertinent figural uses noted in both the *MED* and the *OED* are derived from *Piers Plowman* itself.⁴⁴ Although I am not prepared to push this imagery to its logical limit, I find the apparent distinction

between legal applications of these words to be suggestive: “sute” can mean the advocate who pursues the suit, and it can also mean the law suit itself. “Secte” would be the parties to such a suit. On this legal level, disregarding all other relevant meanings, to say that Christ is “in our sute” could place Christ in the position of being the legal plea itself or being in the legal plea, an image perhaps related to the “love deed” of the “Long Charter,” whereas Christ “in our secte” more overtly suggests Christ as advocate (since he could not in this case be the plea).⁴⁵ Similarly, if we focus on livery alone, we might distinguish between the clothing itself that sets the group apart and the collective members of the group set apart by such clothing. Other differentiations of “secte” and “sute” might become apparent in other instances when questions of agency predominate. In this passage, in any case, the polysemous “secte” and “sute” push forward the very sort of conjuncture of abstract and concrete that made “true love” so effective. Once again, the complexity of the effect resides, in part, in the word itself, as it signifies or points to the mystery of the hypostatic union.

“He is our clotheing” / “we be his corone”: Ecclesiastical Regalia and the Pauline Body of Christ

In the Truelove poems, the tension between concrete and abstract was generated by the botanical and Christological traditions associated with the word, taken together with the meaning of the word itself. In the case of “secte” and “sute” in *Piers Plowman*, that tension similarly came from cultural contexts associated with two related but quite different words. Both words were ambiguous in their meanings, both metaphorically signified the incarnate Christ’s relationship to humanity, and both drew (although in different ways) on imagery associated with clothing. That clothing was both historically particularized (aristocratic livery; clerical habits) and Pauline (Col. 3:9–10, “[strip] yourselves of the old man with his deeds, / And [put] on the new”; Rom. 13:14, “put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ”; but especially Eph. 6:11, “Put you on the armour of God”).

Julian also engages clothing imagery to think through the mystery of the hypostatic union and relies similarly on a tension between a real-world example of clothing and the spiritual meaning of her metaphor. In her case, distinct types of clothing work together as concretely anchored metaphors that evoke the indwelling of God in the soul and the soul in God, a twinned indwelling that, as a highly abstract concept, is difficult to envision in anything but analogous

concrete terms, and is still difficult, even then. She pairs the two metaphors “he is our clotheing” and “we be his corone,” stating them in the simple “A is B” formulation. In Julian’s thinking, the abstractness of enwrapment, concretely described as clothing, is associated with the Pauline notion of the body of Christ and the Johannine concept of indwelling.⁴⁶ Her encompassing vision of what it means to be human makes possible her chiasmic statement about humanity: “Iesus is al that shal be sauid and al that shal be sauid is Iesus.” Julian thus offers a conceptual paradox, the resolution of which requires that one hold in mind simultaneously a realization of the individual (soul) and the collective (Church).

In chapter five, Julian elaborates the metaphor of “he [God] is our clotheing that for love wrappith us” to stress both the intimacy and the domesticity of divine embrace. Here the prominent property of clothing is the completeness and permanence of its covering, the familiarity with which it both embraces and, in the Paris and Winchester manuscripts, layers itself around the loved soul.⁴⁷ In the quotations that follow, underlining and braces (to signal omissions) indicate substantive points of difference among the Sloane, Paris, and Westminster manuscripts:

S: I saw that he is to us everything that is good and comfortable for us.

P: I saw that he is to vs all thing that is good and comfortable to our helpe.

W: Also, I saw that oure good lord is to us all thyng that is good and comfortable to oure helpe.

S: He is our clotheing that for love wrappith us {},

P: He is oure clothing, that for loue wrappeth vs and wyndeth vs,
enwraps

W: He is oure clothyng, the which for love wrappith us and wyndith us,

S: halseth us and all beclothyth us {} for tender love, *embraces;*
encircles

P: halseth vs and all becloseth vs, hangeth about vs for tender loue,

W: helpith us and ablyth us, and hangith aboute us *makes*
excellent for tender love,

S: that hee may never leave us,

P: þat he may never leeue vs.

W: that he may never leue us.

S: being to us althing that is gode, as to myne understandyng.⁴⁸

P: And so in this sight I saw that he is all thing that is good, as to my

understanding.⁴⁹

W: And so in this syght I sawe that he is all thyng that is good, as to my undyrstondyng.⁵⁰

The totality of everything that is good, as well as everything that is good for the aid of mankind, surrounds an “us” that Julian imagines as an individual body, enclosed and enwrapped in a garment.⁵¹ The same individual “us” is simultaneously a collective “us,” making God’s presence both personal and general in Julian’s sight: “us” comprises each of us and all of us. In this way, she conflates the individual soul with the corporate body of Christ. For the metaphor to work, that which is surrounded is by implication compared to a human body; that which surrounds, while still concretely tactile, is not embodied. In Paris and Westminster, the enwrapment is amplified by further swaddling (“wrappeth vs and wyndeth vs”), while in Sloane and Paris enwrapment is reiterated by the double embrace of “halseth us and all beclosyth us,” an idea smoothed out in Westminster, which loses both embrace and enwrapment (“helpith us and ablyth us”).

The metaphor that began as the concretely imagined “he is our clotheing” recurs in more abstract terms in chapter fifty-four as the enclosure of the loved soul in divine embrace. This theologically complex passage culminates in a doubled triple enclosing; it comes in the midst of the consideration of “substance” and “sensuality” I discussed in Chapter 1. Julian’s focus here is on the distinction between God and human “substance,” God’s “substance” being uncreated and human “substance” created. The two are united through the “sensualite” of Christ:⁵²

And I saw no difference atwix God and our substance, but as it were al God, and yet myn vnderstondyng toke that our substance is in God: that is to sey, that God is God, and our substance is a cature in God; for the almyty truth of the Trinite is our fader, for he made us and kepith us in him; and the depe wisdom of the Trinite is our moder in whom we arn al beclosid; the hey goodnes of the Trinite is our lord and in him we arn beclosid and he in us. We arn beclosid in the Fadir, and we arn beclosid in the Son, and we arn beclosid in the Holy Gost; and the Fader is beclosid in us, and the Son is beclosid in us, and the Holy Gost is beclosid in us: almytyhede, al wisdom, al goodnes, on God, on lord. (54.19–30)

The indwelling works in both directions here, as Julian considers how the soul dwells in the Trinity and the Trinity in the soul in a beautifully forward-moving passage that escalates to its affirming and concluding unity. She recapitulates the doubled indwelling near the end of *A Revelation*. Although she does not reintroduce the concrete “clothing” of chapter five, her diction recalls the initial reference, reiterating the intimacy of the embrace and its permanence while references to “tongue” and “heart” point toward inward as well as outward intimacy: “. . . notwithstanding that our lord God wonnyth [*dwells*] in us and is here with us, and al he halsith [*embraces*] us and

beclosith us for tender love that he may never levyn [leave] us, and is more nere [near] to us than tongue can tellen or herte can thyngen . . .” (72.29–32).⁵³

The loving embrace of God is as close as Julian gets to the notion of an erotic marriage between Jesus and the soul, derived from commentaries on the Song of Songs, the kind of relationship popularized in the later Middle Ages in the theme of the lover-knight. Theologically, the point of connection linking the two Trinitarian enwrapments is the Incarnation, a connection made solely through the humanity of the Second Person of the Trinity, as Julian is careful to note elsewhere,⁵⁴ but affecting all three Persons.⁵⁵ The Incarnation is also the pivot point for Julian’s twinned understanding of mutual embrace, the soul in God and God in the soul.

While the metaphor “he is our clotheing” leads to the immaterial and abstracted double enclosing by which Julian represents the concept of indwelling, the later metaphor “we be his corone” serves as its complement, progressing to a further doubled understanding of the relationship between divinity and humanity. “We be his corone” reverses the roles of “he is our clotheing” to imagine collective humanity as the embracing enwrapment. Again Julian offers the concrete starting point for her thought in the metaphoric form “A is B”; again the concrete element shifts toward abstract concept; and again the metaphor comes from the realm of clothing, in this case a specific aspect of royal regalia, the crown.

A complicated symbol, the crown circumscribes several key concepts: as regalia, it is adornment as well as a social marker of kingship, a sign of the King of Heaven; eschatologically, it signals eternal life, or heavenly reward. Early church writers held that the Son is crowned by humanity in two aspects: his human nature, which makes possible his transfiguration through sacrifice, and his body the Church, of which he is head. Later writers drew on this tradition, as Alanus de Insulis explains by means of a passage from Isaiah:

“And you will be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God” (Isa. 62). We find many meanings for diadem. It is said that the diadem of Christ is his human nature. . . . Next, the diadem of Christ is the orderly succession of the faithful, of whom it is said: “as an army set in order” (Cant. 6). . . . Of this crown it is said, “you have set, Lord, on his head a crown of precious stones” (Psal. 20). And this is said of the Church. And, “you will be a crown of glory in the hand of your God.” With this crown his own mother crowned him, that is, the Church. (*De nativitate Domini*)⁵⁶

When Julian first introduces the metaphor “we be his corone,” she does not initially press the concrete aspect of the crown as an encircling of the king’s brow. In this early chapter she describes the Father presenting the Son with the gift of humanity (“we”), figured as a crown:

wherefore we be not only his be [by] his beyng [buying], but also by the curtes geft [*courteous gift*] of his Fader we be his blis, we be his mede [reward], we be his worshippe, we be his corone—and this was a singular mervel and a full delectable beholdyng, that we be his corone. (22.22–26)⁵⁷

Later she considers humanity as a present of the Son to the Father, courteously returned from Father to Son (55.5–11). In between, the crown of humanity reappears as part of the Son's transfigured regalia in the example of the lord and the servant:

Now stondith not the Son aforne the Fadir as a servant dredfully [*fearfully*], unornely [*simply, humbly*] clad, in party nakid, but he stondith aforne the Fadir ever rythe [correct], rechely clad in blissfull largess, with a corone upon his hede of pretious richness; for it was shewid that we be his corone, which corone is the Fadirs ioye, tho Sonys worshippe, the Holy Gost lekyng, and endless mervelous bliss to all that be in hevyn. (51.315–21)

“We be his corone” stresses some of the same aspects of the Incarnation I pointed out in the Truelove poems: Christ's generosity, nobility, flourishing, abundance. These qualities, initially seen here in Julian's point-by-point consideration of the Son's clothing and demeanor, transfer in the course of the passage to the precious richness and abundance of humanity crowning him.

In the parable, the transformation of the Son's clothing signifies, for Julian, an important theological point. Just as she sees the servant as both Adam and Christ—Christ as a Second Adam—, so too does she perceive the servant's clothing as human skin, representative of humanity itself: “our foule dedly [*mortal*] flesh that Gods Son toke on hym, which was Adams old kirtle” (51.307–8). The servant's clothing appears to her useful, serviceable, adaptable— a sort of working man's outfit. At first glance it seems worn out and ready for the rag bag:

His clothyng was a white kirtle, sengil, old and al defacid [*defaced*], died [*dyed*] with swete of his body, streyte fittyng to hym and short, as it were an handful benethe the knee, bar [bare], semand [*seeming*] as it shuld sone [*immediately*] be weryd up, redy to be raggid and rent. (51.168–72)

Christ's sacrifice transforms it, reinforcing the concept of *felix culpa*, the happy fault or fortunate Fall. Christ's post-Passion clothing is more beautiful, she says, than the pre-Fall clothing of the Father. Adam's old “kirtle” is transfigured into Christ's “fair, semely medlur,” a cloth of a mixed color, sartorially preferable, she thinks, to the lordly blue of the Father's unmixed clothing:

our foule dedly flesh that Gods Son toke on hym, which was Adams old kirtle, steyte [narrow], bare and short, than be [by] our saviour was made fair now, white and bryte and of endles clenness, wyde and syde [*generously cut and ample*], fairer and richer than was than the clothyng which I saw on the Fadir; for that clothyng was blew, and Christs clothyng is now of a fair, semely medlur [*fitting mixture*] which is so mervelous that I can it not discrien; for it is al of very worships. (51.307–13)

The very mixedness of the cloth is what elevates it, to her mind. The focus here is on the hypostatic union—on the Incarnation, not on the Passion. The Father’s clothing, as she mentions here, had previously been revealed to her as indicating his lordship: blue, for steadfastness; ample, for largeness of the realm (51.154–59). In addition to the “medlur,” Christ’s regal appearance is reinforced by the crown of humanity.⁵⁸

Both aspects of crown Alanus had linked together—the human nature of Christ and the crown of the Church encompassing the Son’s head—coincide in Julian’s statement in chapter fifty-five that “Criste in his body mytyly [*mightily*] berith [us] up into hevyn” (55.6). She was well aware of the Pauline mystical body of Christ, as her exegesis of the example of the lord and the servant makes clear:

for all mankynd that shal be savid be [*by*] the swete incarnation and blisful passion of Criste, al is the manhood of Criste; for he is the hede [head] and we be his members; to which members the day and the tyme is onknown whan every passand wo and sorow shal have an end, . . . for the langor and desire of al mankynd that shal be savid aperid [*appeared*] in Iesus; for Iesus is al that shal be savid and al that shal be savid is Iesus . . . (51.257–69)⁵⁹

Here in chapter fifty-one, when Julian says that “Criste in his body mytyly berith [us] up into hevyn,” she again admits both an individual and a collective sense. By means of his humanity Christ made possible each person’s salvation; each member of his body, the Church, is offered salvation, and all members are offered it. Both meanings—each and all—are similarly conjoined in the figure of the Son crowned by humanity in chapter fifty-five, as they are in “he is our clotheing” in her chapter five.

With “we be his corone,” Julian lays the groundwork for the place where “he is our clotheing” and “we be his corone” coincide, her later revelation of the indwelling of Jesus in the soul:

And than our lord opened my gostly eye and shewid me my soule in midds of my herte. I saw the soule so large as it were an endles world and as it were a blisfull kyngdom; and be [*by*] the conditions I saw therin I understode that it is a worshipful syte [city]. In the midds of that syte sitts our lord Iesus, God and man, a faire person and of large stature, heiest bishopp, solemnest kinge, worshipfulliest lord; and I saw him clad solemnly and worshiply. He sitteth in the soule even ryte in peace and rest. (67.5–12)

Seeing Christ within the soul, Julian notes bodily attitude, social position, and apparel: large stature, bishop, king, lord, clad solemnly and worshipfully, sitting (later, reigning) in the splendor of the soul.⁶⁰ Given her other references to kingship and the crown, as well as her description here of the soul as a “blisfull kyngdom,” we might have expected that she would see Jesus as king, but why does she also see Jesus as highest bishop? Is the image associated elsewhere with Christ’s humanity?⁶¹ The possibility is all the more tantalizing because

Langland similarly describes Christ as highest bishop (*metropolitanus*), head of the Church, where he links Christ's episcopal office directly to the Incarnation:

For when þe kyngdome of heuene sente his sone til erthe
Mony myracles a wrouhte, men for to torne,

he performed; convert

.....
And bicam man of a mayde and *metropolitanus*
And baptised and bishinede with þe bloed of his herte
Alle þat wilnede and wolde with inwit bileue hit (17.262–69)⁶²

*polished clean
desired; intellect*

The passage previously cited from Alanus de Insulis demonstrates how early church writers glossed the crown (*corona* and *diadema*) in Isaiah 62 as the Church, diadem of Christ. In Zech. 3:1–5, they interpreted Jesus, the high priest, as a “type” or prefigurement of Christ; he is crowned by angels not with a *corona* but with a *cidara*, headdress of the high priest of the Jews. The passage was commonly taken to be a figure of Christ as head of the Church, a connection so widely available in the writings of Jerome, Bede, Rabanus Maurus, and others that Julian might well have known it.⁶³

To make visible the symbolism of both *corona* and *cidara*, one particular form of tonsure (the tonsure of St. Peter) emphasized both the episcopal and the regal aspects of priesthood, with the shaved portion signifying priesthood and the remaining hair (ideally, blond, to resemble gold) corresponding to a kingly crown. As Isidore of Seville explains (although here he calls the *cidara* a *thiara*, a term later reserved for the papal crown):

I think that the priesthood and kingship of the church are represented in them [the priests], because the top of the head is shaved and the circular crown left below. The tiara, in fact, in the time of the ancients was placed on the head of priests (this, made from cotton, was round as if a half-sphere), and this is signified in the shaved part of the head; a crown, however, is the golden circular band that encompasses the heads of kings. Therefore, each sign is expressed on the head of clerics, so that what was written by Peter the apostle, when he taught, “You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood” (1 Pet. 2.9), also may be fulfilled in a kind of bodily likeness.⁶⁴

Although we cannot know the extent of Julian's familiarity with such exegetical interpretation from whatever source, it seems probable that she was aware of a link between Church and crown, especially since the key passage for *cidara* also includes verses that early church writers used to interpret soiled garments as human flesh, as she does in chapter fifty-one. When Julian sees Jesus reigning in the soul as bishop, king, and lord, she reinforces her understanding of the Church as the Pauline body of Christ. She may well have intended an additional association between the Crown of Thorns so prominent in her early revelations and the crown's later more glorious manifestation, as a few critics have noted.⁶⁵ Her earliest description of

the Crown of Thorns indicates that the crown may itself entirely circumscribe her *Revelation*:

the first [shewing] is of his pretious coroning with thornys; and therewith was comprehended and specified the Trinite with the incarnation and unite betwix God and man soule, with many faire sheweings of endless wisdom and teacheing of love, in which all the sheweings that follow be ground and onyd [*united*, “*one-ed*”].⁶⁶ (1.5–9)

Encompassing the Trinity, the Incarnation, and the unity of God and man, Julian’s first showing signals that the crown, a symbol of perfect enwrapment, proves to be more important in her work than it may first appear.⁶⁷

In Julian’s *Revelation*, then, the crown of humanity complements the enwrapment of the soul by God, with the images jointly pointing toward a union between God and humanity that is concretely realized in the hypostatic union. In the Langland example, the words “secte” and “sute” engaged a complex Incarnational interplay of concrete and abstract based in a clothing metaphor but evoking other specific cultural particulars from legal and ecclesiastical realms. In the Julian example, the imagistic cue lies in a concept rather than the polysemy of words—enwrapment or “beclosing” as expressed by the concrete examples of “clothing” and “crown.”

Linguistic Dilation: Abstractions and Near-Personification

Julian and Langland each elsewhere exploit the capacity of language to take on brief and surprising agency within a narrative, a topic that is properly the subject of my next chapter. Here, though, it is worth looking briefly at how such exploitation relies on the tension between concrete and abstract I have been examining. This rhetorical strategy, which I will call *linguistic dilation*, is a trope of sorts, whereby language dilates, or stretches out momentarily, giving agency to an abstraction in a way that shades toward but does not become personification.⁶⁸ While linguistic dilation may be noted in everyday conversation, it is an especially interesting phenomenon to consider in light of the Incarnation because of its enactment of linguistic agency, whereby a fragment of language momentarily takes on a sort of life of its own within a narrative. In this respect, linguistic dilation fleetingly enacts a certain making-concrete analogous to the emanation linguistically expressed in the Johannine “Word made flesh.”

Taken individually, linguistic dilations tend to efface themselves within their textual moment. Consider the following passages from

Julian's *Revelation*:

The *merciful beholdyng of his lofly cher* fulfilled al erth and descendid downe with Adam into helle, with which *continuant pite* Adam was kept from endles deth. And this *mercy and pite* dwellyth with mankind into the tyme we com up into hevyn . . . (51.138–42, emphasis mine)

Pite in love kepith us in time of our nede, and *longing in the same love* drawith us into hevyn . . . (75.7–9, emphasis mine)

And what tyme that our soule is inspirid into our body, in which we arn made sensual,⁶⁹ also swithe [*as quickly*] *mercy and grace* begynyth to werkyng, haveing of us cure [*responsibility*] and kepyng with *pite and love* . . . (55.19–22, emphasis mine)

In these three cases, abstractions engage in actions in time and over time as well as in figural movement through space. In the first instance, the personification of “mercy and pite” is noticeable because they dwell, or remain, with mankind. In exegetical tradition, mercy and pity are closely linked in the context of salvation, because the Psalm text, “*Mercy and truth* have met each other; *justice and peace* have kissed” (84:11), was read as a meeting of the “Four Daughters of God.”⁷⁰ Julian’s treatment is particularly noteworthy, however, for what it does not do: unlike the related examples cited by Colledge and Walsh, Julian’s “mercy and pite” are not characters in an allegory, as they are in Robert Grossteste’s *Château d’Amour* (ll. 289ff.) or in *Piers Plowman* (C.20.116ff.). They do not engage in dialogue; they are not sisters; they do not meet to confer. They do remain with mankind, as we have seen, but they do nothing more personified or allegorical than that. What of “the merciful beholdyng of his lofly cher”? We *could* consider it a personification as well, since “descendid downe with Adam into helle” is characteristic of personifications in the type of allegory common to morality plays, wherein a personified abstraction accompanies another who journeys through a (possibly internal) landscape. However, had the expression come without the cognitive priming for personification provided by “this mercy and pite dwellyth with mankind,” the potential for “the merciful beholdyng” to be personified would probably not even register. “Fulfill[ing] al erth” is less recognizable as a human action than “dwell[ing]” is, and even *dwellen*, in Middle English, carries a sense that does not sustain personification; it can mean, simply, “to remain.”⁷¹

“The merciful beholdyng of his lofly cher” is a useful case for noting how linguistic dilations hover between synecdoche and personification, attached, like synecdoche, to an associated agent but capable of temporal and spatial action independent of that agent; detached, like personification, from their associated agent but only fleetingly, being essentially undifferentiated from their agent.⁷² “The merciful beholdyng of his lofly cher” might be considered a

synecdoche by reading God's loving attitude as part of God's loving self, indicating that God himself never left Adam even in the descent into hell or during his sojourn there. We might see "the merciful beholdyng of his lofly cher" as a personification because it descends into hell with Adam in fellowship, but neither synecdoche nor personification is clearly indicated in this case. The sense here is the more difficult to construe because Julian does not specify whether God or Adam is doing the beholding (God's "lofly cher" directed toward Adam, or Adam perceiving that the "lofly cher" is so directed). Perhaps the beholding is particularly merciful, in this instance, because the syntax might allow for reciprocal gaze. In the absence of further specifically human postures, practices, or characteristics, "the merciful beholdyng of his lofly cher" hovers between synecdoche and personification as a temporary concentration on an aspect of God, a sort of linguistic vernicle: God's countenance not fully fleshed out but fleetingly sketched.

The next two examples are not likely to seem like personifications at all, except perhaps when isolated for close attention. "Werkyng" and "kepyng" are not bodily actions, nor are they tied strongly to human cultural practices, as "dwellyth" is, although in Julian's work they do express what the Trinity does for mankind. We might ordinarily think of these cases as near-personifications, if we consider them at all. However, these minor abstractions are an important feature of our language, common in everyday conversation, and worth noticing in their own right for their figural potential, since given the right conditions they emerge more prominently as figures of speech. For instance, the colloquial sentence, "Your love keeps me from giving up" is but a short step from the latent figural promise of "Your love sustains me." While in ordinary conversation the figural potential of each sentence may remain unexploited, each contains the seeds of personification, given the right context. The latter sentence has greater figural potential because the verb additionally leads to multiple possible metaphors (nourishment, or architectural structure, or buoyancy), as well as to personification through bodily support. Because of its verb, the former sentence must rely more strongly on surrounding references to evoke personification. Keeping is neither particularly bodily nor specifically tied to human cultural practice, although with further development it may lead to a personification: keeping as a shepherd keeps his sheep, or as a lord keeps a servant, for example. In the cases cited here of "pite in love," "longing in the same love," "mercy and grace," and "pite and love," the linguistic dilations become visible by association: when these qualities are linked to the Trinity by the key actions of keeping, drawing, and working, we become increasingly likely to discern the indefinite

outlines of linguistic dilation with each iteration of the verb.⁷³ In this respect, linguistic dilations align with the verb-centered focus of conceptual metaphor theorists, such as I described in Chapter 1.

Unlike symbols, linguistic dilations do not rely for their sense on a fixed signification available to a reader either from an earlier moment in the work or from some common stock. The emergent sense of linguistic dilation must be worked through anew in each case. In this respect, the trope relies heavily on the cognitive process of sense creation. While, as we have seen, the “literal-first” model of cognitive processing supposes that individuals select from among senses in their mental lexicons, other models acknowledge and account for online sense creation (sense creation in the moment of thought).⁷⁴ In a study in the early 1980s, for instance, Herbert Clark and Richard Gerrig wondered what happens when we come across novel uses of words for which no appropriate sense exists in our lexicon. The targets of their study were what they called *contextual expressions*, which they defined as expressions for which “word meanings must be created and not selected,” that creation being based in part on the linguistic context offered and in part on known associations with the words making up the contextual expression. Contextual expressions, as defined by Clark and Gerrig, share an important quality with linguistic dilations, in that “most contextual expressions are so prosaic that they escape notice.”⁷⁵ As an example, Clark and Gerrig offer the following observations on the word *crab*:

One dictionary lists the sense of *crab* that appears in *A crab scuttled along the beach*, but not the senses that appear in *I like crab* [“crab meat”], *There’s crab on the menu* [“a dish with crab meat”], *How many crabs do you have there?* [said by a grocery clerk, “cans of crab meat”], and *I stopped in Perry’s for a quick crab* [“meal of crab meat”] (from the *San Francisco Chronicle*). In a *quick crab*, note that it is the meal, not the crab, that is quick. If we have no more entries in our mental lexicons than there are in the dictionary, then we created the last four senses and did so unwittingly.⁷⁶

For their study, Clark and Gerrig crafted sentences in which proper nouns are treated as verbs. For instance, in one scenario they asked participants to envision their response to the prompt, “Please do a Napoleon for the camera.” Most people imagined “posing with one hand tucked inside their jacket à la Napoleon.”⁷⁷ In this case, they argue, the response is based on a *conceptual framework* derived from what the participant knows about Napoleon rather than on any lexical association; the cognitive processing involved is primarily conceptual, not linguistic.⁷⁸ The on-line sense creation involved in determining what action would constitute “a Napoleon” depends in part on the linguistic context in which “a Napoleon” is requested and in part on the image participants associate with Napoleon in the context of posing.⁷⁹

Such conceptual frameworks also underlie linguistic dilation, as they do allegory, personification, symbolization, typology, and tropes that rely for their effect on abstraction. In the particular examples of the interplay between concrete and abstract I have offered in this chapter, some conceptual expressions (“he is our clotheing,” “we be his corone,” “the merciful beholdyng of his lofly cher”) have depended on contexts based in literary or cultural traditions; others (like “trewe loue” and “sute”) additionally include a lexical component. In an Incarnational context, the tension between concrete and abstract highlights the conjunction of divinity and humanity inherent in the hypostatic union; medieval writers draw on that tension to offer views of Christ’s humanity that explore the nature of personhood. I began this chapter by noting the elusive suggestiveness inherent to the Truelove tradition’s shift between the concreteness of the true-love plant and the ambiguity of the term’s broader significations:

Whan þuse leues to gydere ben set

A trewe loue men clepon it

.....

Or elles seche it in my wounde

ffor þere may trewe loue ben founde (“Long Charter,” 125–30)

Such movement—for medieval writers a seeking of meaning in language as well as a quest for medicinal aid—proffers the notion that agency lies behind action: who set the leaves together in this fashion? Who enables the finding that follows seeking? My next chapter takes up that focus on agency in narrative by means of the deictic markers—the pointing words—that gesture toward the source of salvific agency. When “trewe loue” enacts, as fourteenth-century writers see it, poetic form may sketch the outlines of such action as it issues forth emanatively in a “love deed.”

Chapter 3

Agency: When Christ as “Doer” Is Also the “Love Deed”

Mi self I was þe chartre rede
—“Long Charter,” l. 92, BL Add. 11307

For bloed may suffre bloed bothe afurst and acale
Ac bloed may nat se bloed blede bote hym rewe
—*Piers Plowman*, 20.437–38 ~ B.18.394–95

The pretious plenty of his dereworthy blode ascendid up into hevyn to the blissid body of our lord Iesus Christe, and there is in him bleding and praying for us to the Father—and is and shall be as long as it nedith. And evermore it flowith in all hevyns enjoyng the salvation of al mankynde that arn there and shal ben, fulfilling the nnumber that failith.
—*A Revelation*, 12.28–33

LINGUISTIC DILATION, AS I have argued, exemplifies what can happen when language gains enough agency to achieve near-personification. This elasticity in the linguistic system momentarily draws the focus away from a previous center of attention and then releases it again. Linguistic dilation relies on a fleeting shift in agency; agency is key to the rhetorical strategy even when not the primary center of attention. In his 1997 exploration of the importance of the Incarnation for vernacular theology, Nicholas Watson noted how in certain vernacular texts, including *Piers Plowman* and *A Revelation of Love*, “the act of kenosis itself, Christ’s extravagant gift of his divinity in humility and love, is seen as a revelation of God’s essential nature, which is *more fully* understood through Christ’s incarnation than by any other means.”¹ According to Watson, the texts of which he speaks model “another way of thinking about Christ’s humanity” (beyond Passion meditation) by placing an emphasis on God’s nature as expressed through kenotic action, most especially through Christ’s Incarnation. Kenosis, giving of a gift, revelation, incarnation: all are divine *actions* that further human understanding of the divine nature. This chapter examines agency and action within narrative, particularly the kenotic agency of God’s language of love, as fourteenth-century authors see it.

Each of the textual examples in this chapter investigates the nature of the hypostatic union by complicating the way in which agency is portrayed within narrative, whether in metonymy that turns out not to be metonymy after all, as in Julian's quasi-embodiment of blood, or in the salient quality of emanative metaphor, such as Langland's depiction of the Incarnation as love's leap from heaven. What happens when the Second Person of the Trinity is figured simultaneously as agent and action, particularly when the act in question is, in itself, at least partially linguistic? In the catch title for this section, act and action coincide grammatically in one punning noun ("deed") as well as in the incarnate body of Christ. The conceit of the "love deed," as put forward in the "Long Charter," presents the kenotic gift of salvation through the lens of the kenotic gift of the hypostatic union. The poet envisions Christ writing a land grant, or deed of gift, on the parchment of his skin and rubricating it with his bloody wounds. Agency of this sort is both grammatical and, in an Incarnational poetic, *personal*: Christ both is and does the "love deed," as words and deeds coalesce in action. Such extreme compression of substantive and verb offers an especially helpful way into the issue of how agency and action in narrative may model the conceptual or abstract, in this case, a theological understanding of the Incarnation.

"Mi self I was þe chartre rede": The Love Deed of the "Long Charter of Christ"

All versions of the poems known as the Charters of Christ exploit both senses of the word "deed": an act, a land grant.² Here I am interested in the A-text of the English-language "Long Charter" as a striking and straightforward instance of an Incarnational poetic in a relatively brief narrative poem, where agency and action are key to a theological claim grounded in twinned metaphors of lordship.³ In this poem, "the Word made flesh" speaks from the Cross the words of the charter of salvation he describes as being written by and on his human body. Within the poetic fiction, the words spoken replicate two facets of "deed": the act of conveyance itself and the document attesting that act. The "Long Charter" poet envisions Christ's skin as proclaiming his lordship heraldically by livery (as if his skin were cloth, his *côte armure* or coat of arms) as well as by seisin (his physical possession of his little bit of earth, humanity, where his physical body is thought of as dust, or earth). The poet then reimagines Christ's skin as if it were parchment for the charter. As the underlying vehicle for the metaphors of skin as cloth (*côte armure* of the lord of the fief) and of

skin as medium for writing (the parchment on which the charter is inscribed), “the Word made flesh” is situated at a deictic center unusual even for an exceptionally subject-oriented, semi-epistolary literary form such as a charter poem. In this instance, the Word is the speaking *origo* for both poem and salvation.

In the “Long Charter,” the text of the charter itself is embedded in a narrative framework in which Christ, hanging on the Cross, addresses passersby to tell the history of salvation from the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise to the end of time, with particular emphasis on the period of his earthly life and the Last Judgment.⁴ All of this takes place within the space of only 234 lines. Within the narrative, Christ writes the charter to grant mankind the gift of eternal life in heaven on condition that the grantee pay the grantor the rent of properly performed penance.⁵

Here I trace first the poem’s charter metaphor and then its *côte armure* metaphor in order to draw out the agency involved—intertwined—in these twinned metaphors of lordship. In relating the circumstances of the gift, Christ explains that he decided to write this charter in order to make the conveyance of his gift as secure as possible; however, he was too poor to afford parchment. Instead, he says, for this task he gave his own skin, suitably stretched and dried (on the Cross) “as parchment ought to be”:

Ne my3te I fynde no parchemyn
ffor to laston wel and fyn
But as loue bad me do
Myn owne skyn y 3af þer-to

parchment
last; excellently
commanded
gave

.....
To a pyler I was ply3t
I tugged and tawed al a ny3t
And waschon in myn owne blod
And streyte y-streyned vpon þe rod
Streyned to drye vp-on a tre
As parchemyn oveth for to be

pillar; pinned

[was] washed; own
tautly stretched; cross
stretched
ought

The figure of Christ’s skin stretched and dried as if it were parchment, a specifically imagined, painful reminder of the cruel reality of his suffering on the Cross, heightens the emotional intensity of this vivid first-person narrative. The poet lingers deliberately over the shocking notion that Christ offered his skin as parchment. The passage relies for effect on the strong and immediate contrast between the overwhelmingly sickening wetness of “waschon in myn owne blod” and the unendurable stretch and desiccation of “streyned to drye vp-on a tre.”⁶ Anyone who has been cut suddenly and deeply can identify with the instinctive horror experienced at the first gush of blood and drop in blood pressure; similarly, the poet relies on his readers having

experienced sharp pain from pulling or even touching badly dried-out skin. In the “Long Charter,” the activity of “tugged” (76), “tawed” (76), “washon” (77) gives way to the apparently passive pain of “streyned” (78), “streyned” (79). The appearance of passivity is deceptive, however, as the poem makes clear repeatedly (“Myn own skyn y 3af þer-to” [54]): this is a case of active sufferance.⁷ After the initial setup in lines 51 (he had no parchment) and 54 (he gave his skin), line 78 picks up the sound from its adverb “streyte” (“tautly”) in its verb “y-streyned” (“stretched”).⁸ Line 79 reiterates both verb and sound (“streyned”) for emphasis, adding “to drye” in painful contrast to “waschon in myn ovne blod” just two lines back. The shift from “vpon þe rod” in line 78 to “vpon a tre” in line 79 suggests a movement from particularity (this skin at this time on this cross) to generality (any skin at any time on any parchment maker’s wooden frame). Then the matter-of-fact tone of line 80, achieved largely through the approval implicit in “oveth for to be” (ought to be), ironically points to the special suitability of this particular skin for this particular task. The gift of the donor’s own skin, which would seem to necessitate his death, paradoxically reiterates the largess of this grantor’s gift of eternal life. It thus reinforces the notion, expressed early in the poem, that the kenotic act of Incarnation (a deed) initiates the gift of salvation (a deed). From its inception within the narrative, the charter metaphor reinforces Christ’s lordship, his aristocratic heritage, and his concomitant lordly responsibilities. Conveying a gift via the security of a written deed is figured, in the poem, as a noble act of generosity undertaken despite the lord’s financial poverty.

Christ next makes his own agency clear by indicating how the charter itself was written and what it says. Writing the charter was his idea, he explains (“Another help was in my þou3t / . . . / To make a chartre of feffement [*conveyance of land*]” [38, 42]), and as lord he is the one who gives the gift (“heuene and erthe in present” [41]). He does not write the charter with his own hand, however; the Jews act as his scribes, as it were, writing out his intent: their scornful spitting is the ink, their scourges the pens, the red wounds from scourging the rubrication:

~~Heþerþownd and þe~~ shulle weton

Hou þis chartre was y-wryton

Vpon my neb was mad þe enke

Of iewes spotel on me to stynke

The pennes þat þe lettres wryton

Weron scories þat I wiþ was smyton

Hou many lettres þer on ben

Red and þou maist weton and sen

ffive thousand CCCC fifty and ten

Woundes on me boþe rede and wen

To shew 3ou alle my loue dede

how
face; made; ink
Jews’; spittle

were; scourges

Read; know; see
5,460

fair (shading toward wan, ashen)
show

Mi self I w[ill]⁹ þe chartre rede
 3e men þat gon forþ by the weye
 Abideth and lokeþ with 3oure ye
 And redeþ on þis parchemyn
 3if eny serwe be lyk to myn
*O uos omnes qui transitis per viam attendite*¹⁰
 Wiþstondeþ and hereþ þis chartre rad
 Whi I am wounded an al for-blad (81–98)

eye
 read
 sorrow

He then he goes on to read the charter. This passage invokes a traditional rebuke that occurs repeatedly in devotional lyrics: whose suffering could compare to Christ's? Coming after "Woundes on me boþe rede and wen," that rebuke is particularly intense here in BL Add. 11307, where the aberrant reading of "was" for "will" in line 92 underscores a central message of the poem: that Christ's humanity both enables and embodies the poem's poetic conceit of the "love deed." Indeed, his wounded human body serves as a centering pivot for the poem's form, physically voicing the words of the narrative enacted both by and on itself.

"Was" is almost certainly a scribal error here, although an appealing one given its suitability for the charter metaphor. BL Add. 11307 alone attests "was" for "will," forcing the reading "To show you the extent of my love deed,¹¹ / I myself was the charter red" rather than the more probable version "I myself will [now] read the charter [out loud]."¹² That rhyming line, "To shew 3ou alle my loue dede" (91), capitalizes on the two meanings for "deed" in this poem: an action (i.e., what I did for love, "my love deed") and a deed of gift (the charter, written out of love, "my love deed"). Although in the poetic fiction Christ *does* go on to read the charter out loud ("Mi self I will þis chartre rede," as Rawl. poet. 175 and other manuscripts have this line), the poem is properly an investigation of the implications of Christ *physically being* the charter. Whether intentionally or not, in line 92 the BL Add. 11307 scribe points significantly toward a central paradox of the poem. "Myself I was the charter read [out loud]" recalls Christ as the Word, a key idea for the concept of poem as charter and charter as body. The name "the Word of God" (Rev. 19:13) is reiterated obliquely by the red roses of the Lord's *côte armure* in lines 221 and 222. I shall come back to the charter text itself in the next section of this chapter; here it will suffice to say that the charter confirms the gift of eternal life in heaven provided that mankind "be kynde / And my loue dedes haue in mynde" (113–14). The gift is otherwise unrestricted except that it requires "a four leued gras" (120) as rent. This herb is "a trewe loue" (126) and consists of open confession, contrition, determination not to repeat sin, and fear of God.¹³

After reciting the text of the charter, Christ notes that the deed was

sealed with the five wounds, impressed on the sealing wax of flowing blood:

The selus þat is ^{seals} seled wiþ	
They weron grauon on a stiþ	<i>incised; anvil</i>
Of gold ne seluer ne ben þei no3t	<i>silver</i>
Of styl and yron þey weron wro3t	<i>steel; iron</i>
Wiþ spere of stil myn herte þei stongon	<i>steel; pierced</i>
Thorw myn herte and my longon	<i>lungs</i>
Iron nailes thrilledon me	<i>skewered</i>
Thorw fet & hand to þe tre	
The selyng wax was dere abou3t	<i>dearly bought</i>
At myn herte rote it was sou3t	<i>root</i>
And tempred al wiþ vermylon	
Of my blod þat ran a doun	
<i>ffactum est cor meum tanquam cera liquescens &c(etera)</i> ¹⁴	
ffyue seles weron set þeran	
Of fader and sone god and man	
The fifte þat is to leue most	<i>believe</i>
That I cam of þe holy gost	
In playn power stat to make	<i>condition/right to property</i>

By initially highlighting the rigid materiality of the seal's metal matrix ("grauon on a stiþ," l. 136) rather than the impression it makes in wax, the poet draws attention to the unyieldingness—the hardness—of Christ's tormentors, as well as to God's handcraft and skill in turning such torment to good. The context indicates that the seals are the wounds in Christ's hands, feet, and side, the "wax" impressed to make these seals coming directly from his heart (144). The seals also serve as a mnemonic for two important theological concepts, the Trinity (Father and Son [148] and Holy Spirit [150]) and the hypostatic union (God and man united in the person of Christ [148]). The poet presumes that the reader brings a certain knowledge (Christ was wounded in five places: we can find this in the poem in lines 139 to 144 only if we know to expect it) and layers new theological symmetries onto that knowledge (we can use the five wounds to think about the Trinity and the hypostatic union). The Psalms quotation seems so suited to the metaphor of blood streaming as if it were sealing wax that it could be easy to overlook the care with which the poet has set up the comparison, capitalizing on the salvific liquidity of blood-as-wax by noting the source of the blood ("herte rote," 144, to correspond to "cor meum," 146a) before he introduces the Psalms text.¹⁵ In this way, the crucifixion as told within this narrative takes on a quality of being timeless yet within time, its historical-but-ahistorical nature justified by scripture. Christ, the teller, appears thoroughly to inhabit scripture that both tells and foretells his story.¹⁶

Christ goes on to say that because the charter was written on his skin, he must journey to hell in person to show the charter to the devil.¹⁷ In an ingenious extension of the charter metaphor, he explains

that he will leave an indenture (copy for the grantee) on earth in the form of the Eucharist:

On en~~indetur~~^{indenture}et lafte with þe
That euere þou sholdest syker be
In prestes hond my flesch and blod
That for þe dyed vpon þe rod (205–8)

safe, secure

died; cross

The metaphor of Eucharist-as-indenture ensures that all Christians, living and yet-to-be-born, may obtain an efficacious copy of Christ's body, the charter.¹⁸ Here, too, the poet has found an unusually suitable alignment between his metaphor and the theological point he wants to make. Just as there is no limit to the number of indentures possible and each indenture retains the power of the original without diminishing that original, so too each Eucharistic host "in prestes hond" bears the efficacy of the original *hostia* ("my flesh and blod") without diminishing that original, and so long as wheat is available, hosts may readily be made. To enable the charter metaphor, Christ's body, his skin, becomes the vehicle for the message of salvation, while his body, the Eucharist, is the infinitely replicable form available to Christians throughout time. The original grantor's copy, his crucified body, is preserved archivally in heaven until needed as a witness at the end of time.

The metaphor of skin-as-*côte armure*, while less persistently presented within the narrative than the charter metaphor, nevertheless similarly structures the poem from beginning to end, in tandem with the charter metaphor. By the end of the poem, the Incarnation again is described in terms of lordship, but this time Christ's humanity, as exemplified by his skin, is figured as cloth, the coat of arms by which the lord of the fief is known:

A cote armure ~~be~~^{be}war wiþ me
ffor þat I tok of þy leuere
The cloþ was ryche and ry3t fyn
The chaumpe it was of [white]¹⁹ camelyn
A wel fayre mayde to me it wro3t
Out of hure bour I it brou3t
I-poudred with fyue roses rede
Wiþ woundes þat I deled ded

took from your livery

very fine

field; wool/silk blend/fabric

her bower

spangled

to which I dealt a death blow

The dried parchment of the charter thus becomes supple cloth, a sign by which his beneficiaries will know him. The seals, previously described as "grauon on a stiþ" ("forged/engraved on an anvil," 136), are still visible but now transformed by divine power into his armorial bearings, the five roses spangled ("i-poudred") across a red field (221–22). He will wear the *côte armure*, the device by which he may be recognized, as lord of the fief when he comes to collect his rent:

Whan I ~~donked~~ ^{comked} to þe
 Ther by my 3t þou knowe me
 Tho þat ben of rente be hynde
 An þuse dedes haue no 3t in mynde
 Sore may þey ben adrad
 Whan þis chartre shal ben rad
 Alle þey shulle to helle pyne
 With me to blisse shulle go myne
 Pay rente kep þe fro gylt
 Come and cleyne whan þou wylt
 The blisse þat loste our former frende
 Crist vs sende wiþouten ende

*those who are
 And those deeds
 they; afraid
 read
 the pain of hell*

*guilt
 claim*

While the source of the clothing imagery is scriptural (Rev. 19:13: “And he was clothed with a garment sprinkled with blood; and his name is called, The Word of God”), the “Long Charter” adds the transformation into roses, in the late Middle Ages popularly associated with Christmas as well as with Christ’s wounds, making the cloth visually a simultaneous symbol of Christ’s Incarnation, birth, death, atonement, and resurrection. Coming at the end of the poem as a whole, this retelling of the Incarnation layers the imagery of the *côte armure* onto the “seisin” of the opening lines as well as onto the seal aspect of the charter metaphor. For a reader of devotional lyrics, such heraldic and chivalric imagery would have been implied even in those opening lines describing Christ’s seisin: the maiden who keeps him in secret (“Wel dernely sho kepte me,” 17) recalls the topos of the lover-knight, whose maiden cherishes his arms and keeps them privately, either before a battle or after his death. This topos is clearly invoked here at the end of the poem, with the maiden weaving a fine cloth *côte armure*, which he bears out of her bower [the womb] (215–20).

In the “Long Charter,” then, the twinned lordship metaphors of charter and *côte armure* organize the poem from start to finish as a compressed retelling of salvation history from the conception of Christ to the end of time. By comparison, it may be useful to recall the poem “Loue that god loueth,” which, as I noted in Chapter 2, engages the Truelove tradition much as the “Long Charter” does. Like the “Long Charter,” “Loue that god loueth” links “true love” to the charter metaphor. Both poems number the leaves of the true-love and associate them with the body of Christ. In the “Long Charter,” enumeration of the leaves is a mnemonic device to remember the stages of penance and prompt the search for salvific “true love.” In “Loue that god loueth,” the leaves are associated with Christ’s wounded hands and feet, but not mnemonically. Instead, the poet emphasizes the plant’s medicinal properties (“What soule is syk, lay þat herbe aboue, / Hit makeþ hool al y-fere [*altogether well*]” [191–92]), continuing to extend the advice, repeated in various ways throughout the poem, that one should seek one’s own advantage, in

this case by applying true love (the wounds of Christ) as if it were a poultice.

In “Loue that god loueth,” the true-love plant’s healing properties extend into the charter metaphor:

His herte blood ~~healeth~~ oure hele,
And Ihesus body, þe parchemyn is;
Wiþ trewe loue he prented our sele,
Þat is heritage of oure blis. (181–84)

printed; seal

M. E. J. Hughes has discussed how “our sele,” the seal of the charter, makes possible the “sele,” or bliss, of the heavenly heritage.²⁰ Here also there is a sort of paradox in the revelation that the wounds are medicinal: as Helen Phillips has noted, the four leaves and central berry of this healing plant symbolize the five wounds of Christ’s body, wounds that also seal the charter.²¹ The extreme physicality of the act of printing, or rather imprinting, the seal with the spiritual quality of true love, here figured in material terms as the true-love plant, draws to mind the physicality of Christ’s wounding, much as the “Long Charter” does with “grauon on a stip.” The joyfulness implicit in the paradox of health from death begins, in this stanza, with a salvific act of writing.

Although “Loue that god loueth” is interesting for its sophisticated use of true love and parchment imagery, the metaphors are localized in their effect, being confined to the last four stanzas of a poem otherwise primarily based on economic language of profit and meed (e.g., “Mannys loue was hym so dere” [190] with its use of “dear” as both “valued” and “costly”). The metaphors of true-love plant and parchment do not extend otherwise through the poem, nor do they govern its poetic form except within the relatively small arena of the concluding stanzas, although they do tie in with a larger system of meanings that repeatedly refer to health and (sometimes economic) well-being. In this respect, they differ sharply from the treatment of the same metaphors in the “Long Charter,” where the imagery links sections of the poem from beginning to end by reference to the Incarnation. The “Long Charter,” then, capitalizes on its own formal structure as manifested in the interlocking presentation of these two Incarnational metaphors. As in John 1:14, the form of expression encodes meaning in a way that draws conspicuous attention to its conceptual nature.

Deixis and Power in Charter Poems: The “Short Charter,” Cooling Castle, the “Long Charter” Revisited

Like “Loue that god loueth,” other charter poems share with the “Long Charter” certain formal features and imagery but fall short of the complex integration of literary form and salvific act that underlies the Incarnational poetic of the “Long Charter.” Other poems written in the form of a charter can thus help to elucidate how the “Long Charter” poet takes advantage of the charter format’s unusual suitability for exploring the relationship between the Incarnation and salvation. By contrasting examples that fall short of an Incarnational poetic, we may perhaps see the more clearly how the “Long Charter” poet highlights the issue of agency relative to act. For this purpose, I will examine in detail two poems that present themselves as if they were legal charters without being embedded within a larger work or a narrative framework. As poems that purport to be charters, the “Short Charter of Christ” and Cooling Castle’s charter poem demonstrate ambiguities that poetical treatments of this diplomatic format may exploit in order to raise questions about agency and action, ambiguities that remain largely unresolved in the case of the Cooling Castle poem.²² The “Long Charter,” by contrast, embeds the notion of Christ’s charter within a larger narrative framework and aligns these sites of potential ambiguity. It thus situates agent and act at the center of the charter form in the person of Christ, who serves as donor, action, and legal conveyance. The Cooling Castle poem and the “Short Charter,” then, provide a useful counterpoint to the complex negotiation of form and format that makes the play on the word “deed” in the “Long Charter” so effective.



Figure 1. Outer gatehouse, Cooling Castle, Cooling, Kent. Photograph Cristina Maria Cervone, December 2005.

Cooling Castle’s unusual charter poem consists of four lines only.²³ The poem’s ambiguous deictics raise an important question about agency and action: who, having what power, is granting what to

whom?

Knowyng that heh and schul be
shall be [living]

That i am mad in help of the cuntre
In knowyng of whyche thyng
Thys is chartre and wytnessyng

*made; countryside
acknowledgement*

Two features of the poem support the bold statement in its closing line (“thys is chartre”). First, the initial line renders in English the standard opening phrase of a charter: “*Sciant presentes et futuri...*,” words that similarly initiate the “Short Charter”:

Sciant presentes futuri

Wete now al þat ar here
And after sal be lefe & dere (1–3)²⁴

*know
shall; beloved*

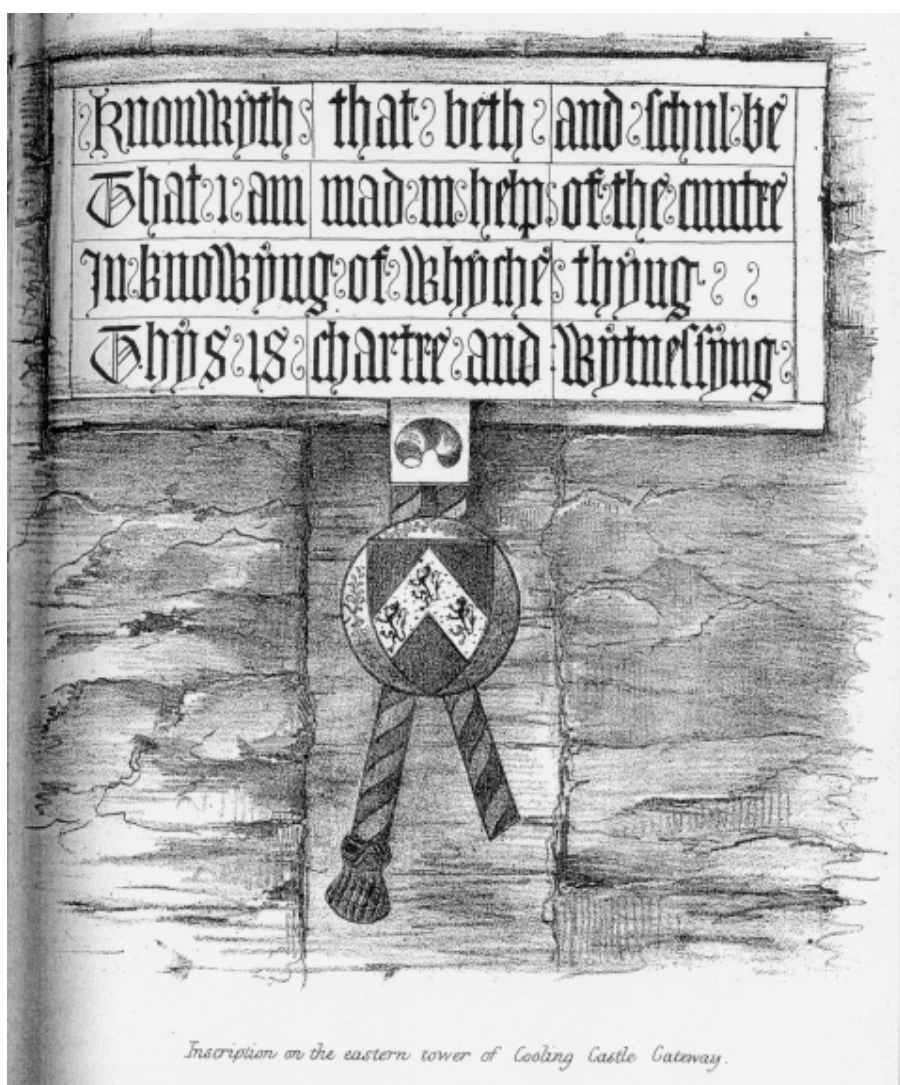


Figure 2. "Inscription on the Eastern Tower of Cooling Castle Gateway." Published in *Archaeologia Cantiana* 11 (1877), between pp. 134 and 135, and credited to Whiteman & Bass, London. Perhaps based on a drawing made by John Green Waller ca. 1864–66.



Figure 3. "The South View of Cowling-Castle, in the County of Kent." Copper engraving, 1735. From Samuel Buck and Nathaniel Buck, *Buck's antiquities . . .*, 3 (London, 1774), unpaginated.

Second, the poem's visual presentation, with the attached seal of the castle's owner, John de Cobham, mimics a real-life, nonpoetical charter. These formalistic elements, on their own, do more to draw attention to the issue of the poem's charter-ness than they do to establish it as an authentic charter. Its emphasis is on form, form that only alludes to but does not seek to replicate function. If we accept the poem as a much abbreviated literary version of a diplomatic charter, however, three issues immediately arise: who is the "I" of the poem? To what, exactly, does "thys is chartre" refer? Most importantly, whose agency is highlighted by the poem's claim to be a charter?²⁵

Who says, "Knouwyt that beth and schul be / That i am mad in help of the cuntre"? Presumably, the fictive speaker of the word "I" does. In a nonpoetical charter, the "I" is the donor, the same "I" whose pendant seal authenticates the document. However, the Cooling Castle poem proffers three potential "I" referents, Cobham, the poem, and the castle, none of which satisfy all points of proximal subjectivity and each of which satisfies at least one. While the seal is clearly Cobham's (his heraldic device is reproduced on one of the poem's enameled plates), the "I" cannot be Cobham; he is not "made in help of the countryside." The poem is "made," but to say it is "made in help of the countryside" would require some explaining. The most likely "I," in this instance, is the castle, but even though the poem's "I" can reasonably be settled on the castle, that reading clashes with the seal's "I," Cobham. That disjuncture does not appear to be accidental. The poem's presentation, including its expensive wroughtness and unusual location on the castle wall, indicates that the interpretative incongruity situated in "I" is deliberate.²⁶ Cooling Castle's charter poem highlights the power dynamic encoded in charters and uses contradictory deictics to raise questions about agency.

In the case of the "Short Charter," by contrast, the "I" of the poem and the "I" of the charter are one and the same, as they would be in a

nonpoetical charter. By comparison with the Cooling Castle poem, the alignment of “I” makes the “Short Charter” seem more straightforward, even didactic:

Sciant presentes & futuri

Wete now al þat ar here

And after sal be lefe & dere

þat I lhesus of na3areth ffor luf of man has sufferd deth

Opon þe cross with woundes fyfe

Whils I was man in erth on lyfe

Dedi & concessi

I hafe gyfen & made a graunt

To al þat asks it repentaunt

Heuen blis with-ouen endyng

Als lang as I am þair kyng

know; here

shall; beloved

love

given and granted

long

The poet takes advantage of the deictics of the charter format to draw attention to Christ’s agency in bringing about salvation. The “I” is Jesus of Nazareth (3), who also gives and makes a grant (6a, 7), precisely as charter format would lead us to expect.²⁷ The initial phrase of the poem and of any charter, “*Sciant presentes et futuri*,” “Know, those present and to come,” presupposes the existence of a time and a place when the donor will *not* be present, a distal point along all three deictic axes. At that time, the written word of the donor, the charter itself, will fill the void, acting in place of the donor to express his intent. This quality of a presence replacing an absence is encoded more generally into the act of writing itself, of course, both because that which is written may circulate with a sort of life of its own apart from the writer while acknowledging by its very materiality that someone must have written it down, and because the moment of writing is fixed in time while the writer’s existence ticks inexorably toward inevitable death.²⁸ The charter format brings to the fore subjectivity, time, and space with unusual self-reflexivity, however: a charter both requires and acknowledges the absence of its agent.²⁹ Other formats, such as a letter, also presuppose an absent writer with something to say and some disjuncture between the moment of writing and the moment of reading, but a charter necessarily acknowledges the absence in its text while a letter might or might not do so.³⁰ Although the charter is not the only epistolary form that capitalizes on self-reflexivity, then, it does so to an extent and in a manner that makes it particularly suitable for exploring the paradox of the Incarnation.

The “Short Charter” demonstrates such Incarnational self-awareness in succinct form by the way in which the materiality of the charter and the materiality of Christ’s body coincide. Christ donates to mankind eternal bliss in heaven, here written in the form of a land grant. Unlike the Cooling Castle poem, the seal of the “Short Charter”

carries metaphorical significance beyond its authentication of the document:

My awne seal ~~herto~~ I hyнге
And for þe more sikirnes
þe wounde in my syde þe seal it is (30—32)

security/certainty

Because the “Short Charter” was copied widely with varying refinements of the charter premise, its readings differ sharply from manuscript to manuscript: the metaphorical nature of the seal is not indicated in all cases. BL Add. 37049 (quoted above) mentions the seal twice, the second time emphasizing the seal’s special efficacy by means of a metaphor, Christ’s wounded side. On the bottom of the page the scribe obligingly sketches a seal emblazoned with wounded heart, five drops of blood, and the sacred monogram “IHS,” along with the tabs attaching the seal to the poem, in imitation of documentary practice. Other witnesses agree in highlighting the metaphorical meaning of the seal as the wound in Christ’s side but neither mention that the seal is attached nor replicate it on the page. Yet others require special attention to work out the seal’s significance.³¹

In all versions of the “Short Charter,” nevertheless, three personas coincide in the person of Christ: the “I” of the poem, the donor confirming his gift by means of the charter, and the owner of the seal. The “Short Charter” carefully and deliberately follows the format of a charter, varying from the form only by giving names rather than seals of witnesses.³² Written on a page, the “Short Charter” firmly announces itself as a charter by both format and presentation without further exegesis, without any need to proclaim its character as charter.

By contrast, the Cooling Castle charter poem replicates the first Latin tag only (*Sciant presentes et futuri*), in English. While “thys is chartre” may prompt the reader to expect elements of the charter format, the poem eludes the sort of formal correspondence played out so well in the “Short Charter.” In addition, just as the “I” of the poem remains ambiguous, the poem’s proximal “this” is inherently confusing. Because the poem’s presentation layers deictic markers, we cannot know precisely whether “this” refers to the fortification (“this is” the castle), the inscription on the castle wall (“this is” the poem), or the seal affixed to both poem and castle (“this is” Cobham’s seal, standing in for Cobham himself, who is not present in the flesh). The subjective ambiguity of “this is” points out that the agency guaranteeing the castle’s power is physically absent from all proximal points, even as the castle’s crenellation appears to confirm Cobham’s commitment to defend the countryside and is authenticated by his seal affixed simultaneously to both charter poem and castle.³³ This issue of agency, particularly the absence or presence of the agent who is the

source of the charter's warranty, is of central importance in the "Long Charter," especially insofar as the poem extends the charter metaphor into sacramental theology by means of the further metaphor of Eucharist-as-indenture. In the "Long Charter," the indenture of the Eucharist presumes a distal time and place when only the indenture will be available, although at the moment of speaking it the originating Word himself is present in the flesh. This Eucharistic indenture is infinitely replicable for those present and to come, the living and the yet to be born, available throughout time wherever and whenever a priest celebrates mass. In this way, the indenture in the "Long Charter" offers a remarkable alignment between metaphor and theological point, where agency and the power that guarantees it are central to that point.

As I have argued elsewhere, the charter-ness of Cooling Castle's poem represents more than a simple literary imitation of the conveyance of a gift: it becomes a key component in a rhetorical strategy to inform our reading of a physical object, the castle, in relation to a man of power, Lord Cobham, who is not mentioned by name but whose authority is indicated by his seal.³⁴ In this respect, the issue of agency in the Cooling Castle poem encapsulates the paradox more fully exploited in the "Long Charter," where the salvific act, the deed, of the Incarnation and subsequent Crucifixion is also the salvific gift, the land grant or deed, of eternal life in heaven, inscribed in the words of the metaphorical charter written on the body of Christ. The charter interprets the act: the words physically imposed on a body give instructions for how a viewer should read that body. Just as the Cooling Castle poem declares that the castle is both militarily effective and of great benefit for the community, the land grant in the "Long Charter" asserts that an apparently ignoble death is in reality a true triumph, both for Christ himself and for the reader/viewer.

The key to both acts of reading lies in acknowledging the source of power that makes the gift possible. In the "Long Charter," the Incarnation and Crucifixion become means for securing and confirming a gift freely given, a gift guaranteed (the "warranty" clause of the charter) by the power of God himself. The lordship language of seisin and livery, which governs the clothing imagery, emphasizes the underlying power that secures this gift. While the "Short Charter" refers to kingship only briefly, the charter in the "Long Charter" is suffused with imagery of kingship as well as lordship, imagery that confirms Christ's parentage and his ability to give a gift free of encumbrances:

Sciant presentes & futuri &c(etera)
 Witeth 3e þat ben and shul betyde
 I ihesu crist with bloody syde

know; are and shall be

That was born in bedlem	Bethlehem
And offred in to Iherusalem	
Þe kynges sone of heuene a-boue	
Wiþ my fader wille and loue	
Made a sesyng whan I was born	seisin
To þe mankynde þat was for lorn	
Wiþ my chartre here in present	
I make heron confirmament	
That I haue granted and y-3eue	given
To þe mankynde with me to leue	live
In my revme of heuon blisse	realm
To haue & to holden withouten mysse	
In a condicioun 3if þou be kynde	
And my loue dedes haue in mynde	deeds
ffre to haue and fre to holde	
Wiþ al þe purtinaunce to wolde	
Min erytage þat is so fre	noble/extensive/unencumbered
ffor homage ne for fewte	fealty
No more wole I aske of þe	will
But a four leued gras to 3elde me	four-leaved herb, "true-love"
.....	
ffyue seles weron set þeran	five seals
Of fader and sone god and man	
The fifte þat is to leue most	believe
That I cam of þe holy gost	
In playn power þi stat to make	condition/right to property
A corone on myn hed haue I take	head
Of thornes in token þat I am kyng	
And frely may 3yuon my þyng	freely; give
This witnessen þe iewes alle	Jews
On knes to me þey gonne down falle	
And loude cryede in hure scornynge	their
Heyl be þou lord of Iewes kyng	

The heritage offered as gift is “fre” (117) both because it is unencumbered (“ffre to haue and fre to holde / wiþ al þe purtinaunce to wolde” [115–16]) and because it is noble, a gift from “þe kynges sone of heuene a boue” (103), a gift guaranteed here by the power of all three members of the Trinity (100–104, 147–51). Once again the “Long Charter” poet incorporates a scriptural citation (Matt. 27:29, Mark 15:18, John 19:3: “Hail, king of the Jews”) by making it integral to the metaphor at hand; not only do the Jews testify ironically to Christ’s kingship, as in the Gospels, but also they act as witnesses to the charter, just as the evangelists and Mary do (“Hijs *testibus* Matheus and Iohan / Luk Mark and many on / And namely my moder swete” [169–71]).³⁵ “Þe iewes” thus become inscribed within the charter and subject to its terms, should they choose to take them up in earnest. The poet’s integration of scripture continues as the charter is finished with Christ’s final words from John 19:30: “*Consummatum* [est] [it is finished]” (187).

By contrast, such interweaving of scriptural and poetic narrative does not occur in the “Short Charter,” where there is no poetic

narrative. The “Short Charter” does not focus attention on the Trinity or the hypostatic union, as the “Long Charter” does, nor on Christ’s parentage. The “Short Charter” works within the parameters set by the charter form to portray the Crucifixion as a salvific act in historical time, with Christ as the agent. The “Long Charter,” however, shifts focus to the Incarnation as integral to salvation history, an action in time undertaken not by the Son alone, and to the ever-replicating potential of salvation in present and future time for those now living and yet to come. Broadly speaking, this may be seen as one difference between a charter as a singular act in time by a singular actor, and a charter embedded within a larger narrative over time. The issue of narration, however, is symptomatic of a larger difference between the two: the “Long Charter” is structured around an Incarnational poetic while the “Short Charter” is not. The opening lines of the “Short Charter” and of the charter within the “Long Charter” demonstrate the distinction succinctly:

Sciant presentes & futuri &c(etera)
~~Wittet in ow þat þe man þurshul betyde~~
~~Aftir his wilfulde & syde~~
~~That was born in bethlem~~
 And offred in to Iherusalem
 Be kynges sone of heuene a-boue
 Wiþ my fader wille and loue
 ffor luf of man has sufferd deth
 Opon þe cross with woundes fyfe
 Whils I was man in erth on lyfe
 Made a sesyng whan I was born
 To þe mankynde þat was for lorn
 (“Short Charter,” 98a-6)06)

The “Short Charter” focuses on the metaphor of Christ’s crucified body as charter, narrowly confining attention to the moment of gift, shifting immediately from its opening statement (lines 1–4, emphasis on charter format) to the Crucifixion (lines 4–6, death on the Cross, five Wounds, a man). The charter embedded in the narrative of the “Long Charter” also opens with an emphasis on the charter format and a quick reference to the Crucifixion (“with bloody syde,” 100) but expands the time frame, as the poem proceeds, to encompass the whole of Christ’s human life from conception to the end of time. Here the first lines of the charter provide more extensive information on Christ’s paternity and status (born in Bethlehem, offered in Jerusalem, king’s son, made a seisin when born). The “Long Charter” lingers on the beginning of Christ’s human life (“that was born . . . when I was born . . .”), situating the moment of gift within the larger framework governed by the twinned metaphors of livery and charter, both driven by a re-imagining of Christ’s incarnate flesh. Christ is not the only

agent, in the “Long Charter,” nor is the Crucifixion the only act. The “Short Charter” isolates agent and action; in the lines I have quoted, aside from the implied audience (“al þat ar here . . .” [1]), Christ is portrayed in isolation. Even his crucifixion, an act that requires agents other than himself, seems devoid of audience or, more tellingly, community. By contrast, the “Long Charter” begins by evoking social communities: familial community (he is a “sone” [103] with a “fader” [104] who is also an agent, having both “wille” and “loue” [104]), ecclesiastical community (he is “offred in to Iherusalem” [102]), nationalistic community (he is “þe kynges sone” [103]), and aristocratic community (“made a sesyng” [105]). The “Long Charter” also reiterates the notion of a communal audience hearing Christ’s words through continued direct address (“to þe mankynde” [106]); Christ is explicitly not alone, even within the text of the charter itself. Actions, too, abound in the “Long Charter,” some of them expressed as substantives rather than verbs (“was born” [101], “offred” [102], “wille,” “loue” [104], “made a sesyng” [105]).

By noting these differences in their structural frameworks, I do not mean to imply that the “Short Charter” is the earlier form, that the “Long Charter” simply expands on the “Short Charter” by surrounding it with a narrative. In fact, for a number of reasons it seems more likely that the “Long Charter” came first, although a definitive chronology has not been determined.³⁶ The “Long Charter,” however, is of greater interest for a study of Incarnational poetics because it places Christ’s incarnate body at the center of the poem in a most unusual and specific way, capitalizing on the alignment between agent, act, and conveyance to create a skeletal structure for the poem as a whole. In this respect, the Incarnational poetic of the “Long Charter” validates the error of BL Add. 11307’s reading for line 92, discussed earlier, because this one line, “Mi self I was þe charter rede,” contains within it the very deictic paradox at the heart of the charter metaphor. Simultaneously pointing toward both senses of “love deed,” the “Long Charter” encapsulates in the speaking, rubricated “charter rede” both Incarnation and Crucifixion, salvific acts of the Word, undertaken for love.

The Incarnational poetic of the “Long Charter” relies for its effect, then, on the extreme compression of agent and action inherent to the poetical conceit of the “love deed.” Other fourteenth-century writers also experiment with agency and action, envisioning the Incarnation as the kenotic action of leaping. The roots of this strain of Incarnational experimentation may be found in a topos first developed in writings of the early Church, “the leaps of Christ.” By the late fourteenth century, the Leaps tradition comes to be mapped onto the Truelove tradition as imagery of springing, and sprouting in a

botanical context takes on increasing Christological and Incarnational significance.³⁷ Perhaps the best-known example, Langland’s masterful depiction of the Incarnation as love’s leap, offers a useful base text for examining agency in the botanical branch of the Leaps tradition, as it developed in the fourteenth century.

The Leaps of Christ and Linguistic Agency

In passus 14 of the C-text of *Piers Plowman*, Imaginatif’s telling of the story of the Incarnation emphasizes the establishment of the Church through highly evocative language in which actions predominate. Placing love’s leap in the midst of Imaginatif’s debate over the relative values of clerical learnedness and innate or natural knowledge, Langland seems to be aware not only of the Christological significance of the Leaps topos but also of its early association with the strength and growth of the Church:³⁸

For the hey holi gost heuene shal to clight cleave	
And loue shal lepe out aftur into his lowe erthe	
And clenness shal cach hit and clerkes shollen hit fynde:	<i>purity/virginity; catch</i>
<i>Pastores loquebantur ad inuicem &c.</i> ³⁹	
Hit speketh þer of ryche men riht nouht ne of ryche lordes	<i>not at all</i>
Bote of clenness of clerkes and keparaes of bestes:	<i>keepers</i>
<i>Ibant magi ab Oriente &c.</i> ⁴⁰ (14.84–88a ~ B.12.139–44a)	

The piercing of heaven by the Holy Ghost, love’s leap to the earth, the catching by cleanness and finding by clergy: these dramatic actions all enhance the otherworldly character of a future action that has already taken place. Imaginatif’s account is notable for bursting on the scene unexpectedly in the midst of a lackluster exposition of the cosmic significance of learning, focusing on the “clerkes” who “fynde” love and the oblique reference to the clergy as pastors or shepherds (“*pastores*”) as well as magi. The active, verbal quality of Langland’s linguistic style throughout *Piers Plowman* is well known.⁴¹ Here, coming in the midst of a discourse on learning and the clergy, Langland’s poetic “leap into sublimity,” as A. C. Spearing has aptly called it,⁴² is all the more remarkable for combining powerful poetic virtuosity with a reference, recognizable as such only by learned clerks, to the topos of the “leaps of Christ.”

The Leaps tradition is not well known today. For understanding how *Piers Plowman* and the botanical lyrics make use of the Leaps, differences between the fourteenth-century treatment of the topos and earlier ones are important. By the fourteenth century, the Leaps topos becomes intertwined with language of springing and sprouting, as in

the Truelove tradition. Furthermore, the fourteenth-century poets are drawing from the insular version of the topos, which focuses on the harrowing of hell, as well as the botanical aspect (rooted in the vernacular English word *spring*). An insular history of the leaps has not been published elsewhere in detail. Before probing Langland's text more deeply, then, a closer look at the early church writings that develop the notion of love's leap will reveal that their homiletic and poetic afterlife informs later elaborations of the topos.

The compression of abstract and concrete by means of action, so effective here in Imaginatif's treatment of the Incarnation, is a salient feature of the shorthand compressed retelling of Christ's life comprising the Leaps. Three scriptural passages serve as base texts for the idea:

behold he cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping over the hills
ecce iste venit saliens in montibus, transiliens colles (Cant. 2:8)

he, as a bridegroom coming out of his bride chamber, hath rejoiced as a giant to run the way
et ipse, tamquam sponsus procedens de thalamo suo, exultavit ut gigans ad currendam viam suam
(Ps. 18:6 [19:5])⁴³

For while all things were in quiet silence, and the night was in the midst of her course,
Thy almighty word leapt down from heaven from thy royal throne, as a fierce conqueror into
the midst of the land of destruction.

*Cum enim quietum silentium contineret omnia, et nox in suo cursu medium iter haberet, omnipotens
sermo tuus de caelo a regalibus sedibus durus bellator in mediam exterminii terram prosilivit.*
(Wis. 18:14–15)

In the leaps of Christ, the ardor of the bridegroom in Psalm 18 and the leaps of Canticles 2:8 and Wisdom 18:14–15 are conjoined to take on specifically Incarnational significance: the Second Person of the Trinity leaps from heaven into the womb of the Virgin in his eagerness to save humanity. That initial leap emanatively sets in motion further leaps that mark out salvation history, each leap corresponding to an event in the life of Christ. Although the number of leaps and the events they denote vary as the topos develops, the Incarnation (leap into the womb), the Crucifixion (leap onto the Cross), and the Ascension (leap to heaven) are always enumerated.⁴⁴ As the first leap, the Incarnation carries special significance in the scheme: the other leaps are to be understood in relation to the first, and the agency of the Trinity enacting salvation is very much the point. Presented in series as eager outpourings of love, the leaps offer a way of considering salvation history in light of the Incarnation.

The topos of the leaps of Christ originated with Hippolytus, in his third-century commentary on the Song of Songs.⁴⁵ However, his Greek is unlikely to have been a direct source for insular writers of the eighth through the fourteenth centuries.⁴⁶ He poses the question, what

does it mean to say regarding the Bridegroom, “behold, my brother came leaping”? He sees the leaps of Christ as one among several possible answers:

Oh, dispensation of new grace! Oh, tremendous mystery! “Behold, my brother⁴⁷ approaches and comes leaping.” What, then, is the leaping word? He leapt down from heaven into the womb of the virgin; he leapt from the holy womb onto the tree; leapt from the tree into hell; sprang up from there to earth in this human flesh. Oh, the new resurrection! Then he sprang from earth to heaven; here he sits at the right hand of the father and again he shall leap down to earth to pay out the price of punishment.⁴⁸

While the manuscript history of this text makes it difficult to say what Hippolytus’s original words might have been, his attention to the serial quality of the topos is manifest: the first leap leads naturally and effortlessly to the next, and so on. The focus here, as for later writers as well, is on the procession of the Son from the Father, on the agency that sets into motion that eager leaping. Hippolytus envisions the leaps of Christ as outpourings of the Word, each one giving rise to the next. In this respect, the topos necessarily locates the Incarnation at its fundamental core. Hippolytus’s listing includes the harrowing of hell and Christ’s earthly ministry after the harrowing. This point is important, because while the harrowing does not appear in the listing of leaps offered by Ambrose or Gregory, early vernacular insular writings do include it.⁴⁹

Like Hippolytus, Ambrose presents the leaps in the context of an allegorical interpolation of Cant. 2:8. In *Isaac, or the Soul*, he explicitly distinguishes among figurative interpretations according to Solomon’s “threefold wisdom,” as he calls it, noting the moral, natural, and mystical senses (the leaps occur in the mystical sense):

And so the Church, which loves Christ, is wounded with love. And so he rouses her and rouses her again, until she hears his voice and invites his presence, because, when he is sought, he not only comes, but he comes leaping, “leaping over the mountains and bounding across the hills.” He leaps over souls which have more grace, bounds over those which have less. Or it may be taken this way: How did he come leaping? He came into this world in a kind of leap. He was with the Father, he came into a virgin, and from a virgin he bounded into a manger. He was in a manger and he shone in heaven, he went down into the Jordan and up onto the cross, he went down to the tomb, rose up from the tomb, and sits at the right hand of the Father. Like the hart who longs for the fountains of water, he went down to Paul and shone around him and leapt up over his Church, which is Bethel, that is, the house of God. For the calling of Paul is the strength of the Church.⁵⁰

Following Hippolytus, Ambrose here explicitly ties the Leaps topos to the Church as a vital institution (“leapt up over his Church”; “the strength of the Church”), a point important for Langland’s use of the leaps, as well.

That association of leaps and Church is also taken up by Gregory in his Ascension Day homily.⁵¹ Because the earliest known English vernacular Leaps passage (in Cynewulf’s *Christ*) is based directly on

Gregory's treatment, this homily is of special interest for understanding later developments in the insular Leaps tradition. In his sermon, Gregory first situates the leaps as a key element in the growth of the Church and then offers them as a model of an exemplary way of life, pointing the way to salvation. He presents the leaps in list form, sandwiched between his citations of two of the three key texts that provide scriptural sanction for the topos, Cant. 2:8 and Ps. 18:6:

Until the Lord ascended into heaven, His holy Church feared the adversities of the world in every way . . . when the Lord sought heaven, His holy Church grew in the authority of her preaching. Hence Solomon speaks concerning the voice of this same Church, "Behold, He comes leaping upon the mountains and springing across the hills" (Cant. 2:8). For Solomon was referring to the high points of the Lord's great works when he said, "Behold, He comes leaping upon the mountains." For coming to our redemption, the Lord gave, as it were, certain leaps. Dearest brothers, do you want to understand His "leaps"? He came from heaven into the womb; from the womb He came into the manger; from the manger He came onto the Cross; from the Cross He came into the sepulchre; from the sepulchre He returned into heaven. Behold, so that we would run after Him, the Truth, manifested in flesh, gave certain leaps for us, because "He rejoiced like a giant to run his race" (Ps. 18:6); and so we might say to Him from the heart, "Draw us after you; we will run in the perfume of your ointments" (Cant. 1:3).⁵²

So when Langland situates the leap of love within Imaginatif's consideration of the value of clerical learning, he is following a juncture of leaps and Church that may be found at least as early as Gregory and, in less pronounced form, even in Ambrose. Gregory presents the leaps themselves as a little exemplum to provoke an *imitatio Christi*. He suggests an appropriate, actively vocal response on the part of the monks listening to his word (" . . . so we might say to Him from the heart . . ."). The activity inherent to the leaps, as he describes it, should spur a corresponding eagerness for salvation, he goes on to say—a complementary and equally active response: "Therefore, dearest brothers, we should follow Him there with our hearts where we believe He ascended with His body." Gregory's technique is, appropriately, homiletic; he wants to lift his listeners into action following on a chain of imaginative and suggestive imagery. As he relates them, the leaps themselves are starkly unelaborated; the very simplicity with which he enumerates them stresses the teleology of Christ's mission. In the context of the Ascension, the extreme spatial displacement from heaven to earth and back again heightens the intensity of the response Gregory advocates. The juxtaposition of the conceptual ("follow Him there with our hearts") with the material ("where we believe He ascended with His body") calls attention to the vastness of the gulf between heaven and earth, suggesting the benefit of having the way forged and a model to follow.

Cynewulf, writing in the late eighth or early ninth century, expands Gregory's listing considerably, devoting an entire twenty-

three lines of verse to enumerating the leaps.⁵³ He also adds the harrowing of hell, which he treats with particular emphasis and at greater length than most other leaps. While his source for the leap into hell is unknown, he could not have gotten it from Gregory, at least not directly. Whether he knew some other version of the leaps, one that did include the harrowing, or whether he himself decided the harrowing was important enough to deserve a place in the scheme, we cannot say.⁵⁴ Unlike Gregory's brief account, Cynewulf's more meditative poetical treatment lingers on the site of each leap—on the event in Christ's life and in salvation history marked by that leap—while not impeding forward momentum inherent to the reiterated concatenation of leaps and bounds:

Wæs se forma hlyp þa he on fæmnan astag,

mægeð unmæle, ond þær mennisc hiw

onfeng butan firenum; þæt to frofre gewearð

eallum eorðwarum. Wæs se oþer stiell

bearnas gebyrda, þa he in binne wæs,

in cildes hiw claþum bewunden,

ealra þrymma þrym. Wæs se þrida hlyp,

Rodorcyniges ræs, þa he on rode astag,

Fæder, frofre Gæst. Wæs se feorða stiell

in byrgenne— þa he þone beam ofgeaf—

foldærne fæst. Wæs se ffa hlyp

þa he hellwarena heap forbygde

in cwicsusle, cyning inne gebond,

feonda foresprecan, fyrnum teagum, gromhydigne, þær he gen ligeð in carcerne, clomnum
gefæstnad, synnum gesæled. Wæs se sixta hlyp, Halges hyhtplega, þa he to heofonum
astag

on his ealdcyððe. Ða wæs engla þreat

on þa halgan tid hleahtræ blipe

wynnum geworden. Gesawen wuldres þrym,

æþelinga Ord, eþles neosan,

beorhtra bolda. Ða wearð burgwarum,

eadgum, ece gefea Æþelinges plega.

The first leap was when he descended within the virgin,

the maiden unspotted, and there the form of man

took on without sin; that would become consolation

for all earthly men. The second springing was

the child's birth, when he was in the manger,

in the form of a child, wrapped in clothing,

the Glory of all glories. The third leap was,

running of the King of the heavens, when he ascended the cross

the Father, spirit of comfort. The fourth springing was

into the sepulchre—when he relinquished the tree—

closed in the earth-house. The ffh leap was

when he the host of the helldwellers abased

in hell-torment, the king bound [him] within,

the fiends' advocate, with fiery fetters, malignant, where he yet lies

in prison, held fast by chains, by sins confned. The sixth leap was, joyful play of the holy
One, when he ascended to heaven

to his former dwelling. Then the host of angels

at that holy time, happy with laughter, became joyous. They saw the Majesty of

glory,

the Chief of nobles, seek the ancestral home,

the bright dwellings. Then became for the citizens,

the blessed, perpetual joy the Prince's play.

Cynewulf continues with the same exhortation that Gregory had expressed more succinctly: as Christ repeatedly leapt, so must we leap within, “in the meditations of our hearts” [“heortan gehygdum,” 747], and do holy works in order to ascend with Christ. Cynewulf’s description of the Incarnation in this passage is particularly noteworthy for its initial emphasis on form (OE *hiw*), a word he lingers over twice: “took on the form of man” (“þæs mennisc hiw onfeng,” 721–22) and “in the form of a child” (“in cildes hiw,” 725). The first two leaps, as he tells them, focus strong attention on Christ’s humanity and the hypostatic union of God and man. In part, perhaps, because the vocabulary available to him in the vernacular necessarily compresses into this one word (*hiw*) concepts for which distinct words exist in Latin, Cynewulf encodes within his diction a brief meditation on both divine and linguistic form conjoined in a word (*hiw*), conjoined in *the* Word incarnate.⁵⁶ Cynewulf goes well beyond Gregory’s line of thought here, not only in elaborating what in Gregory’s listing was spare, but in the emphasis he lays on Christ’s humanity as manifest in his incarnate form, his “mennisc hiw” and the “cildes hiw” that swaddles him in the same line as he is “clapum bewunden.” Cynewulf anticipates Langland’s similar attention to the *form* love takes in the hypostatic union.

In the twelfth century, the leaps are enumerated in Middle English in an Ascension Day sermon in Cambridge MS Trinity Coll. B.14.52 (“The Trinity Homilies”), written by a homilist whose diction indicates his interest in and knowledge of earlier forms of English. His enumeration differs slightly from Cynewulf’s by including the leap back to earth before the culminating leap back to heaven. Before the leaps passage, the homilist quotes the abbreviated version of the leaps in Ambrose’s famous Advent hymn, *Veni redemptor gentium*, naming Ambrose as his source.⁵⁷ He quotes Cant. 2:8, then translates it into English. Next he offers a Latin gloss, which he similarly translates:

Ecce uenit saliens in montibus et transiliens colles. here he cumeð stridende fro dune to dune. and ouer strit þe cnolles. *Septem igitur ut ita dicam saltus dedit. De celo in uirginis uterum. Inde in presepium. Inde in crucem. Inde in sepulcrum. Inde in infernum. INde [sic] in mundum. Et hinc in celum.* Seuen strides he makede. On of heuene into þe maidenen inneðe. Oðer þenne in to þe stalle. Ðridde in to þe holi rode. feorðe ; þanne in to þe sepulchre. fiftē ; into helle. Sixte ; into þis Middenerd. þe seueðe ; eft into heuene.⁵⁸

Diverging from Gregory but agreeing with Cynewulf, the homilist includes the harrowing of hell. Much like Gregory’s, the homilist’s listing of the leaps is spare; unlike Cynewulf’s, his vernacular translation of *saltus* emphasizes lengthening and elongated strides, as in the Psalm text, rather than the bounding exaltation of the Canticles

verse. With the repetition of *inde*, the Latin of this sermon offers a parallelism not taken up fully in its Middle English translation, where the effect is more of a progression (“the first . . . ,” “the second . . . ,” “the third . . .”).

As we have seen, Hippolytus and Ambrose included the leaps in commentaries on the Song of Songs; Gregory, Cynewulf, and the homilist responsible for the Trinity Homilies offered it in the context of a homiletic tradition for Ascension Day. With an Irish bardic poem of the thirteenth or fourteenth century, *Aithrighe sunn duid a Dhé*, attributed to Donnchadh Mór Dálaigh, comes a shift in poetic treatment of the leaps to a penitential rather than a homiletic vein, and perhaps to composition by laymen rather than clerics.⁵⁹ It is the first case I know of where the leaps occur without reference to the scriptures, and also the first outside a homiletic setting. Donnchadh Mór’s source for the leaps is unknown. Like Cynewulf, he treats his topic with considerable care, in a meditative tone. Context here is particularly intriguing: the poem is fully vernacular in topic and presentation. It is neither exegetical nor homiletic: it does not situate the leaps within the Bride’s thought from the Song of Songs nor in the context of the liturgical celebration of the Ascension. It does not call explicitly for a response from the reader or listener; rather, it implicitly invites a shared subject position, whereby the reader or listener may inhabit the thought and petition of the speaker as if they were her own. The poem begins in direct address to God rather than to a bardic patron: “This is my confession, O God, / of all the sins of my body” (1a–b).⁶⁰ Early stanzas dwell on the contrast, expressed in stark opposition, between the speaker’s actions in following desires of the body and Christ’s noble action in allowing the piercing of his body for the effusion of salvific bodily fluid: “A narrow rain-bow came from your side / for the saving of the peoples / a dark stream was poured forth to save us; / it filled Heaven and emptied the earth” (8a–d). After a brief apostrophe, the poet returns to praise of God, this time in terms that emphasize God’s generative power as evident in all created things: “You make branch from nut, / O craftsman of craftsmen, King of kings” (16c–d). When the poet moves on to his consideration of the leaps, it is clear that he is turning to a new topic. It is equally evident that he is deriving that topic from some source, although that source is neither named nor hinted at:

Ruigi Éoghait géantleaps kúid léigir-reanna
 ísle theshochpóintíspheimeajach-garvan
 béigtaingíraughéinnecorra,achndhígh/
 exalted was the last of those leaps.

(19a) A nimble leap from heaven, heaved up thusha-dhúshappacraunle of your portion is beautiful.⁶³

Thim leap into the world fansittig, 'neath the cataract."64

(20a) Shigleapiched of the Cross for him66— painful journey!
Thim leap gold in the saint waschloisin of your family.67

Thid dispelme the gnaigh hisma glichted midlat hiongré inalec forina. the step onto the Cross.68
Raignis again yid leapt fraicht by gnevon pugnach in him don pite, / more whole than all leaps;69

gud the gaothias bhaiseir plúing into soil,70
glaise yin shille leach and aiseir lid chaibh.71

(22a) Thid leap into the world that tofosa b'Nolc apperinde and that of your followers was
bitter.72
Nolc aiseir lid and spúiseir duafte mte gígan the forde m'ingre ad pteidid for yourself.73

It is tempting to read in this encomiastic and penitential poem a shift from the learned use of the topos, as in commentaries and homilies, to a more personal, even meditational, evocation of the Incarnation as a way in to understanding God's relationship to humanity.⁷⁴ What the poem definitively shows, in any case, is lively and imaginative engagement with the topos, not mere iteration of a theme or exemplum. Like Cynewulf, Donnchadh Mór applies considerable poetical skill to transform the leaps into much more than a mere listing.

This, then, is a brief history of the Leaps tradition in the British Isles to (and perhaps into) the fourteenth century, a history that lies behind Langland's leap of love. Langland places the leap in the midst of Imaginatif's discussion of the relative values of clerical learnedness and innate or natural knowledge. In doing so, he draws on not just the *idea* of leaping but also the longstanding association of the leaps with the vitality of the Church. Yet Langland does not recount the leaps in series.⁷⁵ Instead, he focuses on the first leap alone, in spectacular and singular glory:

For the hey holi gost heuene shal to cligh cleave	
And loue shal lepe out aftur into his lowe erthe	leap
And clenness shal cach hit and clerkes shollen hit fynde:	virginity/purity; catch
<i>Pastores loquebantur ad inuicem &c.</i> 76	
Hit speketh þer of ryche men riht nouht ne of ryche lordes	not at all
Bote of clenness of clerkes and kepare of bestes:	keepers
<i>Ibant magi ab Oriente &c.</i> 77 (14.84–88a ~ B.12.139–44a)	

Imaginatif's account zeroes in on the "clerkes" who "fynde" love; the clergy are, of course, shepherds ("*pastores*") as well as learned men ("*magi*"). In the paratactic style of Imaginatif's associative discourse, love's leap comes as a happy surprise, seemingly out of nowhere, the next thought in a developing response to an issue raised several passus earlier: what are the relative values of "clergy" (both clerical learning

and clerics themselves) and “kynde knowing” (innate understanding, particularly as noted in a person without clerical training, where that lack of learnedness may make the individual an especially attractive or likely recipient of grace)?⁷⁸ That issue itself is part of a larger project of the Visio section of *Piers Plowman*, Will’s search for Do Wel, Do Bet, Do Best. As such, a prime focus is the activity of discriminating among life choices on a comparative, not just a qualitative, scale.

Imaginatif presents love’s leap as a self-contained story comprising Incarnation, Nativity, Annunciation to the Shepherds, and Visit of the Magi. It is a discrete narrative set within his argument, and while he does not frame it as an exemplum, he indicates immediately afterward that he has offered it with a point in mind (“Why y haue tolde þe al þis,” 14.99). While his lead-in (“For the hey holi gost . . .”) suggests that he thinks the story clinches his previous point (that innate knowledge has its value but clerical learning should not be dismissed), the simple conjunction “for” scarcely suffices to explain how the Incarnation and Christ’s birth are linked to what he has been saying. His point is embedded not in the *logic* of the connection but rather in the *way* he tells the story, with its strong focus on the integrity and value of (clerical) learning. Form is an important aspect of meaning, here. Rather than characterizing the shepherds as unlearned innocents whose rusticity and practical knowledge bring them close to God, he associates them with the book learning of the magi, most strongly in line 88a. To further his argument, he goes on to imagine oblivious rich men who, snoring in their beds, miss out on all the action, an image he contrasts with the attentive shepherds and learned men, who hear about or discern Christ’s birth and act appropriately:

Ryche men rotte tho and in her sewes their sewes	
Tho hit shoen to shepherdes, a sheware of blisse.	when; shone; shower
Clerkes knewe þe comet and comen with here presentes	
And deden here homage honerably to hym þat was almyhty.	did
Why y haue tolde þe al þis, . . . (14.95–99 ~ B.12.151–55)	

In light of the topic of agency in action, it may be helpful to compare Imaginatif’s recounting of the Incarnation with Holy Church’s description of Christ coming as “the plonte of pees” in passus 1, a passage also informed by the Leaps topos. Here, too, the central issue under discussion is how one comes to knowledge of God, and what the role of ecclesiastical instruction might be. In response to Will’s complaint that he has “no kynde knowyng [*innate understanding*]” (1.137) of her meaning, Holy Church indicates that he is taught in his heart to love God before all others. In partial confirmation of his “kynde knowyng,” she relates the coming of the “plonte of pees,”

perhaps the best-known Incarnational image in *Piers Plowman*. Love transforms itself with astonishing swiftness through an extraordinary series of actions:

Loue is þe plonte of pees,⁷⁹ most precious
of vertues,
For heuene holde hit ne myghte, so heuy hit semede,
Til hit hadde of erthe y3oten hitsilue.⁸⁰
And when hit hadde of þe folde flesch and blode taken
Was neuer lef vpon lynde lyhtere theraftur
And portatif and persaunt as þe poynt of a nelde
That my3te non Armure hit lette ne none heye walles.
(1.148–54 ~ B.1.152–58)

heavy; seemed
begotten
earth
leaf upon linden tree lighter
agile; piercing; needle
armor; stop; high

The weight of love that cannot be contained sets into motion Christ's ministry on earth. Here the leap back to heaven seems inevitable, the lightness of a leaf suggesting both the natural propensity of plants begotten in the earth to reach for the sky and the ease with which an eager God accomplishes what cannot be done by any human. Resonances of the Advent liturgy, Augustine's *pondus amoris*, Gregory's gravitational pull of the universe toward God, and the lightness and ease of action in this passage have already been pointed out by others.⁸¹ But the "plonte of pees" seems notable for another reason as well: in an alliterative poem, a form that thrives on specific detail ("linden leaf," for example, rather than simply "leaf"), why the generic word, "plant"? This word fits in with a larger pattern of Incarnational thought epitomized by the Leaps tradition. "Plonte" (1.148), while here used as a noun, evokes an action ("planting") as well as a vegetative body. "Plonte" germinates poetically until needed when the metaphor of begetting in the earth two lines later recalls Christ's human flesh generated in the womb of Mary. Langland's Incarnational imagery is particularly striking in its relative lack of focus on Mary's humanity—her qualities, her response, her exemplary nature. In love's leap, he reduces Mary to one of her qualities ("clennesse" [14.86]); similarly, in the "plonte of pees" passage she is "erthe" (1.150). That level of abstraction, complementing "loue" that leaps (14.85) and "loue" that is a plant (1.148), shifts attention from grammatical agents, or "characters" (God and Mary), to the theologically crucial processive action of the Son, most strongly to the central action of descent that leads to other action. As in the Leaps topos itself, in both passages one action flows smoothly and naturally to another, from "tocleue" (14.84) to "lepe" (14.85) to a happy "cach" (14.86) to "fynde" (14.86). In both passages, too, Langland makes careful use of negation for an emphatic, heightened, comparative effect, most strongly noticeable with regard to the series of actions in passus 1: "holde hit ne myghte" (1.149), "semede" (1.149), "y3oten"

(1.150), “was neuer . . . lyhtere” (1.152), “my3te non . . . hit lette ne none . . . [hit lette]” (1.154). Both jointly and severally, the two passages capitalize on strong contrasts (“hevene” [1.149, 14.84] and “erthe” [1.150, 14.85]; “hey” [14.84] and “lowe” [14.85]; “heuy” [1.149] and “lyhtere” [1.152,]) as well as complementary imaginative imagery (“persaunt as þoynt of a nelde” [1.153] and “shal tocleue” [14.84]). In passus 1 in particular, ascent and descent are treated as complements and as actions fundamental to the nature of the substance involved: the descent of love to earth is portrayed as being as natural and inevitable as the leap to heaven.⁸²

The strong compression of action and abstraction in both passages highlights the power of imaginative language, of language in action; that technique, as is well known, is one of Langland’s great strengths. The very generality of the word “plant” emphasizes the action first taken by the “plonte of pees,” a planting in humanity’s “earth,” while enabling a botanical metaphor fixed on no particular species. Further actions of the “plonte” (Christ’s ministry on earth, Christ’s ascent to heaven) are common to the Leaps tradition. The key link between the “plonte of pees” and love’s spectacular leap lies in English vernacularity, in a word Langland does not use in either passage: “spring.” By the late fourteenth century, poets writing in English mapped the leaps of Christ onto botanical imagery of springing and sprouting, playing off the double meaning of “spring” as a bodily leap and organic growth, enabling an emphasis on the greenness of Christ’s efficacious and salvific vitality.⁸³ I noted earlier that *Imaginatif* tells love’s leap as a little narrative embedded within a larger discursive argument. Lady Holy Church does something similar, as befits the homiletic nature of her discourse. Narrative form is part of what makes love’s leap so striking, in *Piers Plowman*. Coming in the midst of argumentative discourse, the strong compression of action and abstraction highlights the power of imaginative language, of language in action.

Linguistic Dilations Revisited: Narrative Agency in Synecdochic Action and Anaphoric Pronouns

From the verbal, active nature of compression in love’s leap, I would like to turn briefly to the verbal nature of certain near-personifications, or what I earlier termed *linguistic dilation*. I am interested in linguistic dilation as a regular feature of language, not just an ornamental “add-on” or poetical effect. As I noted earlier, the *dilatatio* of linguistic dilation both defers the prevailing narrative and

momentarily draws forth an abstraction in and through time, generating a proto-narrative that, with further development, could become personification allegory, then re-subsumes the abstraction. This momentary shift in agency is apparent even in everyday conversation, as in the example I gave earlier (“your love sustains me”). Because of its elasticity, linguistic dilation readily enables meditation on abstract concepts as expressed in and through language. In particular, linguistic dilation offers attractive possibilities both for exploring the nature of personhood and for modeling the processive flow of divine emanation, which Langland exploited for theological purposes in love’s leap. As *dilatatio* implies, the action of drawing out or spreading forth governs the rhetorical force of the near-personification; both action and the agency that sets it in motion are important focuses of attention. Two linguistic dilations from Julian’s *Revelation* highlight agency in the context of repetition with variation, an important strategy in Incarnational poetics (I discuss this topic in Chapter 5). In the first case, a near-synecdoche draws attention to the nature of the hypostatic union; in the second, anaphoric pronouns enable an understanding of the work of the soul as something of a cooperative or collective venture. Both cases rely for effect on a cognitive shift that is not strongly signaled or rhetorically marked within a repetitive pattern that is strongly marked.

The first of these linguistic dilations has a specific and obvious connection with Christ’s body as well as with fluidity: the near-synecdoche of Christ’s blood in Julian’s *Revelation*. In her fourth revelation, just after she has described how the blood she perceived flowing from Christ’s crucified body would have soaked her bed had it not been part of a showing, Julian stresses both the bounteousness of the blood and its serviceable character, comparing it to water created by a loving God as a help for his creatures:

And than cam to my minde that God hath made waters plentivous in erthe to our service and to our bodily ease, for tender love that he hath to us, but yet lekyth him better that we take full homely his blissid blode to washe us of synne; for there is no licor that is made that he lekyth so wele to give us; for it is most plentivous as it is most pretious, and that be the vertue of his blissid Godhede. And it is our kinde and ablissfully beflowyth us be the vertue of his pretious love. The dereworthy blode of our lord Iesus Criste, as verily as it is most pretious, as verily it is most plentivous. Behold and se. *The pretious plenty of his dereworthy blode* descendid downe into helle and braste her [burst their] bands and deliveryd al that were there which longyd [belonged] to the curte [court] of hevyn. *The pretious plenty of his dereworthy blode* overflowith al erth and is redye to wash al creaturs of synne which be of gode will, have ben and shal ben. *The pretious plenty of his dereworthy blode* ascendid up into hevyn to⁸⁴ the blissid body of our lord Iesus Criste, and there is in him bleding and praying for us to the Father—and is and shall be as long as it nedith [is necessary]. And evermore it flowith in all hevyns enjoying the salvation of al mankynde that arn there and shal ben, fulfilling the nouble that faillith. (12.13–33; emphasis mine)

What begins as a simple comparison (plenteousness of the blood

similar to plenteousness of the created waters) cascades into a description of blood so serviceable that it not only washes sinners clean but also harrows hell, ascends into heaven, bleeds and prays for mankind, rejoices in salvation of those already in heaven, and draws to heaven those who shall be saved.⁸⁵ At the same time it unites all who shall be saved, whether under the earth, on the earth, or above the earth. The concept of Christ's blood washing penitent sinners is a great commonplace of Passion devotion, its bounteous nature a related important and ubiquitous feature of late medieval theology, literature, and art. Julian's treatment, however, is remarkable for the number and nature of the blood's actions, as well as for the poetic economy with which she presents the concept.⁸⁶ The special suitability of the blood for these tasks, to her mind, comes in part from its sharing human nature ("our kinde"). The grammatical agent she chooses is not simply "blode" but "the pretious plenty of his dereworthy blode," yoking "plenty" with "blode," linguistically suggesting the comingling of abstract and concrete, as if one might equate to the other.⁸⁷

Several actions of "the pretious plenty of his dereworthy blode" initially might appear to be clarified by reading "blood" as a synecdoche for Christ himself: Christ harrows hell, ascends into heaven, bleeds and prays for mankind, rejoices in the salvation of the elect, and draws the elect into heaven. Julian's usage turns from a synecdoche to a complex linguistic dilation, however, with the surprising phrase that momentarily suggests personification of the blood: "and there is in him bleding and praying for us to the Father" (12.30–31). Does the act of bleeding or the act of praying primarily trigger this shift? Blood that bleeds might or might not have its own (personified) body; perhaps one might say that blood bleeds by its very nature, after all, since when we see it, that is what it is doing.⁸⁸ Prayer, a human cultural practice, is more difficult to explain away. When a feature of a body is imagined as engaging in an act usually associated with personhood, we may well perceive that feature as personified. Here, the imagined life is intercessory in nature, fitting in with Julian's understanding of the Son as mediator between humankind and God. In the theological debate over the holy blood's status during the *triduum mortis*, a debate taking place during Julian's lifetime, the Dominican position similarly relied on the concept of mediation.⁸⁹ They argued that the blood must retain the hypostatic union precisely because it brings about redemption in the process of being shed: if divinity were separated from humanity at the moment of bleeding, the sacrifice would not be complete. According to this view, in enabling salvation, Christ's blood is intercessory by nature.⁹⁰ In this respect, the linguistic dilation of bleeding and praying blood here in chapter twelve additionally recalls chapter six, where Julian

describes “the goodness of God” as “the heyest prayer” (6.30). There “the blissid kinde that he toke of the mayd” is “the chiefe and principal mene” (6.25–26) for salvation; here, Julian indicates that “our kinde” (“our nature”) includes blood as well as body (“it is our kinde” 12.20): Christ’s blood and Christ’s body are correlative.

Julian’s linguistic dilation is particularly striking in that its layering of action makes synecdoche impossible once blood bleeds and prays within Christ’s body. Julian surely intends more than one reading here: on the one hand, the blood is Christ’s own, physically bleeding, blood; on the other, blood working as a “mene” to achieve “our salvation” points self-referentially both to Christ and to his saving act, the shedding of the blood through the Passion. The elision of actor and act works in a similar way to the “love deed” of the “Long Charter”: in Julian’s vision, Christ’s blood both is and does the “love deed” of salvation that begins in the Incarnation. Langland relies on a similarly quasi-metonymic construction (in which blood bleeds), in order to call attention to the common humanity shared by Christ and humankind. In Langland’s case, the notion of blood bleeding depends for effect on the shock engendered when the pun is discovered; the shift comes about because the noun “blood” turns into the verb “bleed”:

For bloed may suffre bloed bothe afurst and acale

Ac bloed may nat se bloed blede bote hym rewe (20.437–38 ~ B.18.394–95)

“A blood-relative may suffer a blood-relative to be both thirsty and cold, but a blood-relative may not see a blood-relative bleed without rueing it.” Here, too, the blood that bleeds is Christ’s.⁹¹

As a linguistic dilation, Julian’s “pretious plenty of his dereworthy blode” challenges conventional boundaries of embodiment, conceptually flowing outside and then back into its body as we imagine and then resist the notion of it having a figural body of its own. Because in this case the praying takes place within the body of Christ and the prayer is Christlike, the implied layering of mutual intent within the physical body of Christ resembles the multiple enclosings of the soul within the Trinity and the Trinity within the soul, much like “He is our clotheing” (5.7) and “We arn beclosid . . .” (54.25–30).⁹² The acts of bleeding and praying work together in this context to highlight the interlaced character of the Trinity itself and, with respect to the hypostatic union, of the Trinity with man.

In a different linguistic dilation, not specifically Christological, Julian’s syntax is so loose that the antecedents for “it” are unclear; does agency shift within this passage?

Thankyng is a new, inward knowing, with gret reverens and lovely drede [awe] turnyng ourselfe with all our myghts into the werkyng that our good lord steryth [*guides*] us to,

enjoyng and thankynge inwardly. And sometyme, for plenteushede, *it* [thankynge?] brekyth out with voyce and seith: “Good lord, grante mercy [*many thanks*]; blissid mot thou be!” And sumtyme whan the herte is drey [dry] and felyth not, or ell [else] be temptation of our enemy, than *it* [herte or thankynge?] is dreven by reason and be grece [*grace*] to cryen upon our lord with voyce, rehersyng his blissid passion and his gret goodnes. And the vertue of our lords word turnyth into the soule and quicknith the herte and enirth *it* [the soul?] be his grace into trew werkyng, and makyth *it* [the soul?] prayen wel blissfully and trewly to enioyen our lord; *it* [not the soul—the heart’s prayer? the process of thankynge?] is a ful blissful thankynge in his syte. (41.56–68, emphasis mine)

If “thankynge” itself “brekyth out with voyce” and later perhaps “is dreven by reason and be grece to cryen upon our lord with voyce, rehersyng his blissid passion and his gret goodnes,” the passage operates much as blood bleeding did in chapter twelve, nearly personifying an abstraction. If, on the other hand, we may find other antecedents (heart, the heart’s prayer) for the pronouns in question, we might have a personification. When more highly developed linguistic dilations, such as the blood of Christ, also govern the structure of a literary work, minor linguistic dilations begin to stand out. Collectively, the linguistic dilations in Julian’s work become reassuringly representative of the Trinity, available to humanity, it seems, at every turn, as serviceable as Jesus, who “usith the office of a kinde nurse and hath not all to don but to entendyn abouten the salvation of hir child” (61.71–73). As a result, linguistic dilation in Julian’s writing emphasizes the unity of creation acting in concert with God and de-personalizes the actions of the cosmic drama. For Julian, Christological focus on a humanly individual saviour, the sort of Christ-lover embraced by Margery Kempe, becomes almost unimaginable. Jesus is at times indistinguishable from the Trinity as a whole. Eve and the devil drop out of the story of the Fall entirely, and Adam’s role is overshadowed by its transformation through the Son’s actions. Julian herself frequently stands in for all of mankind, or at least for her “even-Christians,” her fellow Christians, as her showings are for the most part to be understood as pertaining to all who shall be saved, not to her in particular.⁹³ The body of Christ (mankind, even-Christians) acts as a collective; the Trinity (embodied in Christ) also acts as a collective; the Trinity and mankind together act as a collective.

Unlike “the pretious plenty of his dereworthy blode,” a conspicuous subject that draws more attention to itself with each repetition, here the innocuous “it” effaces itself in the process of Julian’s meditation on the form of prayer she calls “thankynge.” A more specific antecedent would detract and distract; the very ambiguity and shifting agency of “it” over the course of the passage instead produces the effect of linguistic dilation. The passage ideally models what Catherine Emmott has termed “a ‘cognitive discourse analysis’ approach to anaphoric theory,” which “discard[s] the idea

that a pronoun refers back and that what it refers to is an antecedent.”⁹⁴ Instead, the pronoun works to recall a mental construct or cognitive framework previously primed by the antecedent; the pronoun thus shifts focus:⁹⁵

The antecedent becomes responsible for triggering the focusing inference about a particular character, but is not referred back to when a pronoun is interpreted because the mental representation of the character has been “brought forward” in the mind. The mental representation is *activated* during priming and focusing, for it is already in the reader’s consciousness, whether textually overt or textually covert. Decoding a pronoun no longer involves “searching,” “recalling” or, strictly speaking, “accessing” information. . . . Reference theory then becomes a matter of explaining how complex mental representations are constructed and held in consciousness, rather than of just discussing the proximity of anaphors to their antecedents.⁹⁶

While Emmott’s application of this theory centers on character development in post-medieval narrative theory, her model works well to explain how the apparent shift in the antecedent for Julian’s “it” does not come across as jarring or problematical. The main subject of Julian’s attention is a process, “thankyng.” “It” does not track a single antecedent agent through the passage; in fact, the agent enacting that process is not, in this instance, the point.

With the actions of linguistic dilations, I have moved closer to issues treated in the voluminous body of critical work on personification and allegory. The important question of what allegory is, and does, and how we can recognize it when we see it, is well beyond the scope of my study. Here, in fact, I am primarily interested in what most people would not consider to be allegory at all, or even personification; as I have argued, linguistic dilation can nearly approach personification but falls short. If allegory tends to proffer itself as a puzzle, as Stephen Barney has suggested,⁹⁷ or as lines of narrative to be decoded, linguistic dilation tends to efface itself, much as an Incarnational poetic does. In ordinary conversation, such linguistic dilations often pass unnoticed; they do not call attention to themselves as rhetorically marked.⁹⁸ In Julian’s writing, agents may be effaced into pronouns; in Langland’s work, agents more frequently morph into actions.⁹⁹ In both cases, the quiddity of an abstraction in action puts across the point. Such active agency is especially interesting to think about in the case of the “love deed” of the “Long Charter,” or of love’s leap, where leaping is what love both *is* and *does*. Both agent and action coalesce in leaping as a way of understanding divine emanation. As the writers who are the subject of this study see it, the processive flow modeled in love’s leap must be understood in and through time; it is in and through poetic time that they seek their understanding of the Incarnation. Time in narrative, then, is the subject of my next chapter. The full word Capgrave sought “to uttir pleylnly in langage of oure nacion”¹⁰⁰ may be revealed, it

would seem, in “the fullness of time.”

Chapter 4

Time in Narrative: The Teleology of History Meets the Timelessness of God “*in plenitudo temporis*”

And thenne spak *spiritus sanctus* in gabrieles mouthe
To a mayde þat hihte marie, a meke thyng withalle,
That oen Iesus, a Iustices sone, most iouken in here chaumbre
Til *plenitudo temporis* tyme ycome were.

—*Piers Plowman*, 18.123–26 ~ B.16.90–93

To a mayde I demytted me
ffor no chalange sholde be
Wel dernely sho kepte me
Tyl I my tyme wolde se
ffourty wokes saue v. dawes
To fulfulle þe olde lawes
—“Long Charter,” ll. 15–20

and yet cowth I not taken therin ful vnderstandyng to myn ese at that tyme;
for in the servant that was shewid for Adam, as I shal seyn, I saw many
dyvers properties that myten be no manner way ben aret to single Adam.
And thus in that tyme I stode mekyl in onknowyng for the full
vnderstandyng of this marvelous example was not goven me in that tyme.

—*A Revelation*, 51.67–72

WHILE TIME MIGHT not necessarily be a central topic in a given narrative, of course a narrative cannot help but take some stance with regard to the passage of time, even if only because narratives present themselves through a process of interpretation over time. For writers interested in the Incarnation, diverse ways time can be represented in narrative offer useful perspectives from which to view the nature of the hypostatic union: the cascading outpouring of God’s love may be depicted as an event leading to other events, for example, but also (and at the same time) as a relationship of divinity and humanity. As a moment in time, the Incarnation marks God’s physical entrance into human history, while as a state of being—God and man united in the person of Christ—the hypostatic union exists both within history and outside the passage of time. Medieval writers therefore looked to make sense of the Incarnation by simultaneously holding time-bound and timeless views of the hypostatic union in mind: both the self-

oriented time of lived human experience and the transcendence of divine providence, God's instantaneous understanding in an eternal present (while the latter can perhaps be grasped as a concept, although with great difficulty, it cannot be experienced directly except by God). In addition, writers consider the Incarnation from a point of view grounded in the distal deictics of history (God's personal entrance into human time in *that* place, at *that* time, or *there, then*) as well as from one working outward from the present moment (the Incarnation's import for any individual at a given time, framed in proximal deictics: in *this* place, at *this* time, or *here, now*). Since a poet may usefully exploit the tension implied by the conjunction of there/then and here/now to highlight the special import of time with respect to the Incarnation, an Incarnational poetic may engage the there/then historicity of scripture as part of the experiential here/now linked to characters acting within a narrative, or to readers of the narrative, as is the case in the examples in this chapter (from *Piers Plowman*, *A Revelation*, the "Long Charter," and the lily crucifixion).

While the way in which an Incarnational poetic works as a structure is properly the topic of Chapter 5, here I wish to consider how poetic form may deliberately and simultaneously embrace both historical and transhistorical perspectives to draw out the Incarnational possibilities latent in a "full word." The concept of "*plenitudo temporis*," "the fullness of time," is linked in scripture to Mary's pregnancy (Gal. 4:4). *Plenitudo temporis* thus picks up on and extends the notion of plenitude I examined earlier when I discussed Capgrave's desire to speak "pleynly" regarding the Incarnation.¹ The passages I examine in this chapter are self-reflexive on the issue of time, as they are with regard to growth in understanding over time. These passages do not promise that a full understanding of the Incarnation will be achieved through reading about it, but rather that such understanding may be glimpsed, as in an enigma, in a sort of pregnant thought. For the issue of time as enacted in and through narrative, *plenitudo temporis* therefore offers an especially useful mnemonic.

The Paradox of Temporal Fluidity in Narrative

In passus 18 of *Piers Plowman*, time bears theological significance specific to the Incarnation. Passus 18, like the two passus that follow it, invites meditation on a historical view of time (a human perspective) alongside a transhistorical one (God's perspective). While the initial topic of the passus is charity (this passus begins with the

well-known Tree of Charity sequence), Langland's thought experiment conspicuously relies on rapid and elastic fluctuations in his treatment of time.² His striking phrase "*plenitudo temporis* tyme" (126), "the moment of the fullness of time," draws on Gal. 4:4: "But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent his Son, made of a woman, made under the law."³ In Gal. 4:4, *plenitudo temporis* signals God's entrance into human time. However, exegetical tradition also recognized *plenitudo temporis* as the beginning of Jesus' public life. Because passus 18 links the Incarnation and the life of Christ linguistically through the phrase "*plenitudo temporis*," the implications of that association warrant special attention. My specific interest here is in how Langland uses the teleology of narrative to enable temporal fluidity within narrative without rendering the narrative unintelligible. The master stroke, in this instance, is his doing so by focusing on time in a way that highlights theological implications of *plenitudo temporis* while simultaneously drawing on historical and transhistorical understandings of time. To see how this works, we need to begin with the opening of passus 18.

As with the "figuratively" passage in passus 16, which I considered in relation to Augustine's *enigma*,⁴ Langland's focus in passus 18 is on what charity is and how it may be found. Here, however, that focus is supported by his attention to varied ways in which he can represent the passage of time within narrative. A substantive difference between Will's question about charity in B and in C is important. In B, Will asks Anima what charity is: "Ac 3it I am in a weer [*doubt*] what charite is to mene" (B.16.3). Anima answers with a brief allegory of the schematic sort, a static description of a "ful trie [*excellent, proven*] tree" whose trunk is "ruþe [*pity*]," leaves "lele [*faithful*] wordes," and so forth (B.16.4–6).⁵ In C, however, Will asks Liberum Arbitrium to show him the way to charity (18.1–3):

"Leue *liberum Arbitrium*" quod y, "y~~deme~~^{believe}
y hope,

Thow coutheest teile me and teche me to charite, as y leue?"⁶

Thenne louh *liberum Arbitrium* and ladde me
forth with tales

believe
smiled; led; [instructive] stories

Liberum Arbitrium does not tell Will where to go, or sketch a diagrammatic allegorical picture, or show him a destination, but instead accompanies him there in person, telling him unspecified things on the way in the form of stories. Their destination is a tree called "trewe loue" (9), a useful part—but only a part—of the answer to Will's question about charity, and the tree's description at first suggests allegory of the static, diagrammatic sort. Appropriately, however, the answer to "teach me the way to charity" must be

enacted in and over time, as lived human experience. Liberum Arbitrium's action in accompanying Will while teaching him the way is, in itself, an example of charity, a work of "henderesse" [*courtesy*] (13), of "helpe-hym-þat-nedeth" (13) through "benigne speche" (11), and is followed by Will's thanks "that 3e me hider kende [*taught me the way here*]" (17).

I suspect most readers read these opening lines fairly rapidly to "get the picture," as it were, without thinking too deeply about whose agency is implied by diverse parts of the tree, although it soon becomes clear, as others have remarked, that in C the tree is not a "picture model," to use David Aers's term, or *pictura*, to use Mary Carruthers's. Nevertheless, some aspects of the allegory remain ambiguous. Given the complex way Langland has treated charity all along, and given the challenging lines that follow, it is worth considering whose love is indicated in the name of the tree called "trewe loue." God's, for humanity? God's, in creation? God's, enacted through humanity? God's, enacted through Christ's humanity? Humanity's, toward God? Humanity's, toward humanity? Are we prompted to consider an abstract understanding of the essence of faithful love? Are we to think of any and all of these simultaneously? Because no distinction is made, the text allows for all.⁷ Similarly, while the tree lives through loving looks, Langland does not specify whose gaze enables the tree to thrive (18.9–11):

"The tree hatte trewe loue," quod ~~he~~^{he} ~~the~~^{the} ~~trinite~~^{trinite} hit sette.

Thorw louely lokynge hit lyueth and launseth vp blosmes ~~loving~~^{loving} looks; lives; brings forth blossoms
The whiche blosmes buirnes benigne speche hit calleth." *these blossoms men call gracious speech*

The "louely lokynge" might naturally be understood as human glances;⁸ however, the context additionally and simultaneously allows for a reading in which the Trinity lovingly watches the tree's growth, where the loving action of planting the tree enables further and spreading loving actions, so the growth of the tree makes visible the emanative growth of love in lived experience. In this emanative aspect, the planting metaphor works in a similar fashion to the Incarnational "plonte of pees" I discussed earlier, and indeed both the name "trewe loue" and the fact that this tree is grafted offer potential for meditation on the nature of the hypostatic union.⁹ The doubleness implied by the graft is replicated in the macaronic form of these lines, which bring both Latin and English together when Latin names that resonate with Incarnational significance appear amid the vernacular: *cor-hominis*, *ymago-dei*, *caritas*. Might this be a typological moment, setting up for the story of the Incarnation that is to come barely a hundred lines later? If we are perhaps encouraged to consider how

Christ as Trewlove is “planted” by the Trinity within humanity, the associative reference—if so it is—to the hypostatic union is fleeting, however, and not the main point here.¹⁰ The focus of *Liberum Arbitrium*’s answer was the agency that enables life and growth: any associative link to the hypostatic union only enriches our understanding of that agency.

As the narrative continues, the poet persists in envisioning charity as experiential and transformative. The fact that time by nature cannot stand still is implied in the choice of metaphor: Will sees not just a tree, but the *growth* of a tree that flowers (“launseth vp bloemes,” 10; “in flouryng tyme,” 35) and bears fruit (“and þerof cometh a goed fruyt,” 12; “til hit waxe rype,” 42; “sonnere wollen rotye [rot],” 60). For effectiveness, the metaphor relies on the very fact that these stages of growth are common to all fruit trees, not particular to this singular tree, and also that growth is seasonal. Further, a season progresses in one direction only: first the tree blossoms, then it fruits, then the fruit falls. While some of these may occur at the same time on one tree (fruiting while blossoming, for example), the sequence cannot be run in reverse: although seasons recur cyclically, time moves only forward.

At this point, Will asks *Liberum Arbitrium* two questions: what kind of wood are the props made from? What is the name of the tree? Both are framed as real-world, material queries, and both elicit instead a metaphysical response, an allegory with its own narrative timeline existing independently of the time-line governing the conversation between Will and *Liberum Arbitrium*, a conversation, we might recall, that is taking place in a dream.¹¹ In this part of the allegory, the tree’s life cycle initially correlates with the life of an individual: the tree’s “flouryng tyme” (35) seems to be the equivalent of youth. Yet as this allegory unfolds, the time scheme transforms. When the fruit (of charity) ripens (42), the fiend tries to destroy it (43). Taken together, ripeness and the fiend suggest the end of one’s lifetime, but the progression of the narrative, wherein “bagbitares [*slanderers*] and braulers [*brawlers*] and . . . bolde chidares [*scolders*]” attack and shake the tree (46–47), shifts away from the tree-as-lifetime scheme. The weapons in this fight—the props supporting the tree—are not linked here to the life cycle of an individual, nor to an imagined life cycle of charity itself: indeed, each weapon would be useful at any and all times in one’s life. A doubled or multiple notion of time results, with the tree-as-lifetime-of-the-individual running simultaneously with a consideration of what charity is and how it works. On the one hand, we might say that such parallelism is simply and obviously an aspect of the other-pointing-ness of allegory, a doubled running of time both within a narrative and outside the

localized conditions of narrative. Here, though, where Langland wants to call attention to God's time and human time, to the historical moment as well as its timelessness, the doubling of time bears theological significance that speaks to humanity's relationship with God.

In response to Will's request to taste the fruit, *Liberum Arbitrium* calls in Elde, or old age, and the allegory explicitly invokes life-cycle time in a new way.¹² From the scheme in which the products of the tree—flowers, fruit—indicate a stage in an individual's life by analogy with the life cycle of the tree, Langland shifts to a scheme in which an allegorical figure representing a stage of life, old age, acts directly and bodily on the tree.¹³ The allegory further takes on a surprisingly historical dimension, with the fruit suddenly identified specifically as biblical figures largely drawn from the Old Testament ("Adam and Abraham and ysaye [*Isaiah*] þe prophete, / Sampson and samuel and seynt Iohann þe Baptiste," 112–13). Presumably, this is a representative rather than comprehensive list of the "holy men" the devil was hoarding up "*in limbo inferni*" (115). Given the rapidly changing signifiers, one might easily feel it is a bit of an understatement for Will to say that the tree is "a propre [*distinctive, unusual, excellent, appropriate*] plonte" (100)!

As other scholars have noted, the presence of John the Baptist is potentially jarring, because he seems out of place—or, more properly, out of time. He is Jesus' contemporary, yet appears among these Old Testament figures at a moment in narrative time immediately before Jesus is born.¹⁴ Allegory of Augustine's *enigma* sort encourages us to keep guessing at significations, to fit this piece of the puzzle with the ones we had before. In this case, that moment of puzzlement foregrounds the distinction between Old Testament history and New Testament history just before Langland introduces the Incarnation (which, as fulfillment of prophecy, bridges the two). He does so in vivid, startling, evocative terms that conspicuously attest to the importance of the event. *Liberum Arbitrium* led Will to the tree while telling him stories, as I noted earlier. Similarly, with the introduction of Old Testament and New Testament histories, Langland shifts to a narrative mode that calls attention to its own storytelling properties: the Incarnation will be told as a story—a New Testament story—to be followed up immediately by further New Testament stories of the life of Christ.

The time-referents of the allegory have shifted in other ways, too. Now being ripe indicates being at the point of death (cf. also 20.412), whereas earlier in the allegory, ripeness signified a place in the hierarchy of merit: those most in the sun ripened soonest through "þe hete [heat] of þe holi goest [*Holy Spirit*]" (75). Given this new focus

on mortality, why would Langland choose Elde, rather than Death, as the personification who shakes down the fruit?¹⁵ For one thing, old age fits within traditional taxonomies of the stages of life, the sort of scheme used to good advantage in, for example, another alliterative poem of Langland's day, *The Parlement of the Thre Ages*.¹⁶ The main point of Elde shaking down the fruit must surely be that individuals die and are carried off by the devil. However, death is not limited to the aged, as everyone knows; indeed, that very point is voiced compellingly by the old man who is attacked by Death in *The Parlement of the Thre Ages*, for instance.¹⁷ More cogently for Langland's purpose, Elde continues the established cognitive framework based on *time*, whereas an allegorical character named Death would shift the focus away from time to the dichotomy of life and death just at the moment when Langland is about to highlight God's entrance into human time, the Incarnational moment.¹⁸ Indeed, Langland reserves his theologically informed consideration of the strife between life and death for greater effect in the joust/Crucifixion and then the harrowing of hell, both in passus 20.¹⁹

"Thenne," as Langland puts it, lingering deictically over the historical moment of the Incarnation, "thenne" the theologically difficult concept of the hypostatic union manifests itself in an unusual and provocative sequence of verbs of action: "seized," "hit out," "flew," "seek out," "rob" (118–21). The Incarnation—the startling action of *Libera Voluntas Dei* ("the free will of God")—is startlingly expressed in concrete verbs of motion, with Langland's daring thought here paralleling the previous actions undertaken by *Liberum Arbitrium* when he wielded the three props of the tree against the attack of the worldly winds and the fiend (25–52). In B it is Piers who seizes the middle prop [i.e., Second Person of the Trinity] and throws it after the fiend, enacting the Incarnation; in C, it is *Libera Voluntas Dei*, a character who appears and acts in this passage only, and only in C (18.117–22):

anger/mind/will; in the majesty of God

Thenne moued hym moed in *magestate dei*
 That *libera voluntas dei* þe laughte myddel Shoriare
 And hit aftur þe fende, happe how hit myhte.
Filius by þe fadres wille fley with *spiritus sanctus*
 To go ransake þat ragman and reue hym of his apples
 That thorw fals biheste and fruyt furste man disseyued.

seized
hit out at; happen as
the Son; flew; the Holy Spirit
seek out; [false] accuser; rob
promise; first; deceived

"Thenne" might seem a sequential follow-on to the robbing actions of the devil in line 115: the devil seized the fruit *so then* the free will of God seized the prop. However, the main force of the time sense here appears rather to be "at that time," or "there, then," closer to "in the

beginning,” or even perhaps a kind of story-time marker, like “in those days” or “it came to pass,” and indeed the story of the Incarnation that follows, and Christ’s life after it, bears strong markers of being narrative.²⁰ A particular story is being told, but a story of import to a wider Christian community, recalling again that *Liberum Arbitrium* led Will to the tree while telling him stories, presumably useful ones. The narrative style suggests that *that* time, *then*, bears theological significance for *this* time, now.²¹

Rather than moving ahead with further action, lines 120 and 121 reiterate the action of lines 118 and 119 in new terms but just as forthrightly: the free will of God seized and hit; with the Father’s will, the Son flew with the Holy Spirit to seek out and rob. The Son’s rightful robbing of the devil to recover the fruit (121) interlaces the story of the Incarnation with the story of the Fall, even though on a historical level the presence of John the Baptist on the tree in line 113 would render such a time sequence unintelligible, at least in terms of human lives. The story here is one of recovery, a rightful anger against a wrongful robbery achieved through deceit: the robber robbed, the guiler beguiled.²²

“And thenne . . .” Langland continues to linger over the moment of the Incarnation (123). Is this a retelling of the same action as above, or an extension of it, perhaps shifting the mode of discourse?²³ The text does not specify. In any case, the emanative action here is all of a piece, from the initial “Thenne” of line 117 through the ensuing lines on the Incarnation and the life of Christ until Will wakes up at line 178. The Holy Spirit speaks through Gabriel, giving localized, aristocratic context to the Gospel of Luke’s account of the Annunciation, and introducing a complex consideration of *plenitudo temporis*, a concept drawn not from Luke but, as I mentioned earlier, from Gal. 4:4 (18.123–36):

And thenne spak <i>spiritus sanctus</i> , in the Holy Spirit	
gabrieles mouthe	
To a mayde þat hihte marie, a meke thyng withalle,	was called; meek
That oen Iesus, a Iustices sone, moste iouken in here chaumbre	a certain; must perch; her
Til <i>plenitudo temporis</i> tyme ycome were	the moment of the fullness of time
That elde felde eft þe fruyt or full to be ripe ²⁴	when old age [would] fell again; before
That iesus sholde iouste perfore by iugement of Armes	joust for it; judgment
Who sholde fecche this fruyt, the fende or iesus suluen.	fetch; fiend; himself
The mayde myldeliche tho the messenger grauntede	mildly then
And saide hendely to hym, “lo me his hondmayden	courteously
For to worchen his wille withouten eny synne:	work; any
<i>Ecce Ancilla domini &c.</i> ”	Behold the handmaiden of the lord (Luke 1:38)
And in þe wombe of þat wenche was he fourty wokes	weeks
And bycam man of þat maide mankynde to saue,	save
Byg and abydyng, and bold in his barnhoed	big; enduring; childhood
To haue yfouthte with þe fende Ar fol tyme come.	fought; fiend; before full time

In its mode of telling, the Incarnation story appears as *if* it will be unfamiliar, in a mode similar to a mythical story or a fairytale (a certain Jesus, a maiden called Mary).²⁵

Gabriel's speech is rather extraordinary. The aristocratic elements—the joust, Mary's courtesy—offer context localized to Langland's day and to the poem. In Luke's account, Gabriel's explanation of what will happen has none of Langland's focus on the contest with the fiend, centering instead on Mary's wonder and the angel's responsiveness to her concern (Luke 1:28–37).²⁶ The question of “how shall this be done?”—so central to the Gospel—is entirely lacking from Langland's account, however. Even more surprising, perhaps, is the difference in the initial focus of each speech: the Gospel's famous greeting “*Ave, gratia plena, Dominus tecum*” seems to be taken a bit for granted in Langland's version, its resonance perhaps to be found back in lines 4 to 9, where the tree called “trewe loue,” a descriptor with Christological associations, grows graciously in “*cor hominis*” (the heart of man): Mary is *gratia plena*, full of grace (Luke 1:28), and “trewe loue” will grow within her.²⁷ The Gospel's emphasis on fullness, with its prefiguration of pregnancy, remains in Langland's telling, but *plena* shifts to the *plenitudo* of *plenitudo temporis*, from Gal. 4:4–5:

But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent his Son, made of a woman, made under the law:
That he might redeem them who were under the law: that we might receive the adoption of sons.

In Galatians, the fullness of time is clearly the moment of Incarnation, which Paul links to fulfillment of the law.²⁸ But in Langland's telling the fullness of time has its own appropriate time, “the fullness of time's time,” a time that Langland additionally associates with the Crucifixion and the Harrowing, as I quoted more fully above.

By comparison, a similar system of imagery is at work in the A-text of the “Long Charter,” where Christ emphasizes in technical terms the security of the means by which he gained legal authority to write such a charter: with his birth, he tells us, he made a *seisin*, the technical term for physical possession of land or real property, in order to secure his property for a proper conveyance. This statement comes at the very beginning of the poem (emphasis added):

ffro my rych I cam a doun	kingdom	
To seche þe fro toun to toun		seek you from
Min erytage þat is so fre		heritage; noble/extensive/generous
In þl myschef to 3euon it þe		give
[whan] þat 3efte I 3euon sholde		gift; give
I dede as þe lawe wolde		did; required
To a mayde I demytted ²⁹ me		humbled/descended

ffor no chalange sholde be
 wel dernely sho kepte me
 Tyl I my tyme wolde se
 ffourty wokes saue v. dawes
 To fulfull þe pe olde lawes
 þe mayde was trewe mylde & fre
 Sho receyued me for þe
 By my manhede and my grace
 Thus cam sesyng furst in place

so that
 secretly/privately; she
 [= the fullness of time]
 forty weeks less five days
 noble; generous
 manhood
 seisin [possession]

“I came down from my kingdom,” he says, “to seek you from town to town in order to give you my unencumbered [also: noble] heritage [of everlasting life in heaven] to remedy your misfortune. When it came time to give the gift, I did as the law required: I humbled myself to a maiden [was conceived] so there could be no legal challenge [to my possession of humanity]. She nurtured me privately until the end of my term, forty weeks less five days, in order to fulfill the old laws.” Enfeoffed of mankind, he thus gains his human estate by physical possession over a period of time, the gestation in the womb. The “seisin” of humanity takes place in the Incarnation as Christ takes on human flesh (“by my manhede”) when Mary is overshadowed by the power of the Holy Spirit (“by . . . my grace”). Although this passage contains no Latin lines, it seems to recast the two scriptural phrases: “by . . . my grace” recalls “*gratia plena*,” “full of grace,” the angel’s greeting (Luke 1:28), and “Tyl I my tyme wolde se” translates “*plenitudo temporis*” (Gal. 4:4). Such manipulation of language, not a slavish adherence to the letter of the Latin but a transformation of the spirit of the text for its new situation in an English poem, indicates that this poet appears at times to think through Latin terms, as Langland does. It would be interesting to know whether or not any other vernacular poems take a similarly legalistic view of *gratia plena* and *plenitudo temporis*. Both *Piers Plowman* and the “Long Charter” make a point of mentioning the typologically significant forty weeks of gestation; the “Long Charter” does so in a liturgically meaningful way (tied to Lent).

To this point, then, the temporal fluidity of the narrative in passus 18 has gone something like this. Will asks Liberum Arbitrium to show him the way to charity, and Liberum Arbitrium brings him to the tree, which is growing, blossoming, and fruiting in ways the poet addresses both as a hierarchy of merit and as the life cycle of an individual. The notion of tree-as-life-cycle-of-an-individual runs along simultaneously with the notion that the tree schematically demonstrates what charity is and how it works. Elde, a stage in the life cycle, acts on the tree, which now has a historical dimension in its fruit. *Then* comes the Incarnation, *and then* a fuller narrative of the Incarnation, and in the midst of this passage is *plenitudo temporis*.

The judicial focus of “a Iustices sone” (125) ties in with the legalistic and redemptive focus of the Galatians passage (“made under the law . . . that he might redeem them who were made under the law”). The striking thought that lies behind “*plenitudo temporis* time” is all the more evident if we translate the Latin into English: “the fullness of time’s time.”³⁰ In Langland’s use, fluidity and compression of time encourage us to contemplate power veiled in the Incarnation, to consider how this power is correspondingly revealed in the life of Christ and in the Crucifixion.

While the “devil’s rights” aspect of passus 18 to 20 has been widely discussed, Langland’s focus on the appropriate time, *plenitudo temporis*, deserves a closer look: what exactly does it mean to say Jesus “yfouthte with þe fende Ar fol tyme come” (136)?³¹ If “the fullness of time” is taken in Galatians’ sense as the moment of Incarnation, the fight would have to come before Mary conceives. Indeed, we might then read lines 117 to 119 as describing that very fight, which happens *before* “*Filius* by þe fadres will fley with *spiritus sanctus*” (120):

Thenne moued hym moed in *magestate dei*
 That *libera voluntas dei* laughte þe myddel Shoriare
 And hit aftur þe fende, happe how hit myhte.

For this reading, however, we must also contend with line 126, which clearly shifts *plenitudo temporis* to after the gestation, whether at birth or at the Crucifixion (as perhaps suggested by the mention of the joust, which does not come until passus 20), or even perhaps at the Last Judgment (suggested by the word “judgment” itself in line 128).³² I do not think we need to trouble ourselves too much over the shifting signifiers here, however. I will not belabor the point that Langland does not set up a systematic, one-to-one correspondence between *plenitudo temporis* and Incarnation; while the two remain associatively linked throughout, this allegory, as we have already seen, is no *pictura*. Lines 119 (“hit aftur þe fende”), 128 (“sholde iouste þerfore”), and 136 (“To haue yfouthte with þe fende”) set up a relationship between the Incarnation and Crucifixion, on the one hand, and the Harrowing with its parliament of the devils on the other. Line 127 continues the problem from the earlier episode: why Elde and not Death? Here, perhaps, we might hear a resonance of “the old enemy,” the devil.³³

In any case, the focus on the appropriate time, *plenitudo temporis*, bridges the story of the Incarnation (lines 117 to 135) and the story of Christ’s life (lines 135 until Will wakes up at 178), in which Liberum Arbitrium teaches Jesus the physician’s profession, “Til *plenitudo temporis* hy tyme aprochede” (137–38), “until the fullness of time’s high [= appropriate, but also exact or precise] time approached.”³⁴

Given the legalistic and judicial imagery of the Incarnation passage, the shift of focus to the life of Christ as the training of a physician might come as a bit of a surprise. To be sure, the imagery ties in with the common trope of Christ as physician and also resonates with other medicinal imagery in the poem. More urgently, it anticipates the Samaritan in passus 19, an episode later in narrative time but not strictly speaking an event in the life of Christ, as the Gospel tells it (Luke 10:25–37), although in *Piers Plowman* it is clear we are to see Christ in the Samaritan (and the parable was commonly interpreted in this way).³⁵ In passus 18, Jesus is trained to be a physician, and then in passus 19 we (and Will) see him being one, though not in his own “life” in a narrative sense (such as a saint’s life, a *vita*, or a hero’s life, a *geste*), but in an abstracted time outside of the narrative of his life as physician we already read in passus 18.

Is the Incarnational *plenitudo temporis* out of place, then, in line 138, in the life of Christ, and what is “*plenitudo temporis* hy tyme”? In passus 18, Christ is tutored by Liberum Arbitrium, who teaches him “lehecraeft” [how to be a doctor] (18.137) “[t]il *plenitudo temporis* hy tyme aprochede” (18.138)—approached, but had not yet come.³⁶ “My time is not yet come”—but there is a sense in which it both has, and has not. Even in the Gospels, a full revelation of Christ’s nature and its significance for humanity is repeatedly deferred. Here in passus 18, we are told who he is, but he cannot be recognized fully, much as Will earlier saw him “but figuratyfly” (16.296).³⁷ The deictics of revelation continually shift the moment of “now” to “not yet,” promising in each time a further time yet to come that will fulfill its prefiguration, a revelatory moment when we will discover there *was* a prefiguration, making the future moment of here/now a time when Christ’s divinity will be made known not “in *enigmate*” but “*facie ad faciem* (16.296a). “[P]*lenitudo temporis* hy tyme” suggests that the fullness of Incarnation is worth thinking of in conjunction with the plenitude of lived human experience. If the revelatory moment when Christ’s divinity will be made known fully is yet to come, in the context of passus 18 there is nevertheless a sense in which he is known already in this passage by his works (of charity), some of them happening before he is born (hitting out at the fiend; the Incarnation itself), and some foretold by a shifting sense of time (the joust, the judgment). “God is charity” (1 John 4:8), and “loue shal lepe out aftur into þis lowe erthe” (14.85).³⁸

This being so, we have left to account for the fact that in C, Liberum Arbitrium is the one who teaches Jesus to be a physician (in B, *Piers Plowman* teaches him).³⁹ The cognitive framework that supports the metaphor of Christ the physician was anticipated back in the Tree of Charity section, where it appears in the sense of ministration rather than healing per se. Because the ministration

framework is not salient when first introduced, it would be easy to miss seeing how Langland has prepared the way for this version of the life of Christ, and for the Samaritan. Similarly, because a complex narrative structure intrudes between Christ as physician and Christ as Samaritan, and that complex structure (Faith/ Abraham/herald/priest—Hope/Moses/spy/levite—Charity/Jesus/Christ/Samaritan) requires considerable cognitive processing in order to follow the taxonomies, it would be easy to lose track of the ministration framework. Nevertheless, the ministration framework is important to understanding “*plenitudo temporis* hy tyme,” so it is worth a closer look, and for that it is necessary to revisit some early lines of passus 18.

In the Tree of Charity sequence, Will asks basic questions about the tree (is the fruit all of one kind? why are there three degrees representing types of life if we are taught there are two forms of living, active and contemplative?). Liberum Arbitrium responds by on the one hand looking backward to humanity’s birth, repeatedly making reference to Adam, and on the other anticipating humanity’s salvation through the Incarnation and the ministrations of Christ, two stories he is shortly to relate. First, regarding the nature of the fruit, Liberum Arbitrium likens Adam to the tree and the rest of humanity to apples.⁴⁰ Answering the question about forms of living, Liberum Arbitrium continues his praise of virginity, again mentioning Adam as he explains that virginity was the first fruit of God’s creation (18.90–94). The examples of virginity following Adam are pitched toward ministration. By “clenneste men and fayreste” (18.94) Liberum Arbitrium suggests he might have clerics in mind, who “Shollen serue for þe lord sulue [*himself*]” (18.95), where “serve” enacts more than one sense.⁴¹ Clerics “stand in for” Christ on earth, or serve in his place, but they also “serve as” Christ in the sense that they minister to his people’s health, an aspect of Jesus’ life on earth about to be told in this passus (Christ the physician) and to be taken yet further in passus 19 with the ministrations of the Good Samaritan (or Charity, or Christ). Similarly, the “Maydones and martres” are described as having “ministrede hym here on erthe” (18.96), that is, they served/helped/rendered aid to Christ on earth (the antecedent for “hym” is “þe lord sulue” in line 18.95).⁴² The complex layering of Langland’s thought sets up the metaphor he will introduce three “scenes” later, *after* Elde shakes the tree, *after* the Incarnation, *within* the life of Christ. What does it mean that Free Will teaches Christ to be a physician? Just *before* the scheme of Faith, Hope, and the Samaritan (i.e., charity), we see charity ministering in human dimensions, in the full potential of human action, both in the hierarchy of merit represented by fruit on the tree and in the life of Christ. At the point

when *Liberum Arbitrium* teaches Jesus to minister, the poem also instructs us to read typologically, closely attending to events as they unfold in narrative time but additionally seeking connections across and beyond the realm of narrative time, to see how “*plenitudo temporis tyme*” will unfold. As we come to know, Elde’s felling the fruit and the fruit’s ripeness will be related to the joust; the joust will be related to the gestation; the fight “*Ar fol tyme come*” (18.136) will be related to learning “*lechecraeft . . . / Til plenitudo temporis hy tyme aprochede*” (18.137–38).⁴³

While this investigation of *plenitudo temporis* in passus 18 to 20 has taken a long time to consider, it is difficult to break off even here, for portions of the narrative I have not yet mentioned continue to investigate the fullness of time in new dimensions, with the implications of time’s fullness doubled, or trebled, or more. Here is Abraham, for example, who acts within the narrative as the historical figure but also figuratively as faith, and as a herald, and as a proto-priest. More than most passages in *Piers Plowman*, this section, in all its rich suggestiveness, has tantalized critics disposed to attempt fourfold allegoresis. It is tempting to note how levels of meaning proliferate even when one restricts the historical aspect of the allegory to its fourteenth-century context only. Perceiving Abraham as a herald encourages us to think of the aristocracy; considering his role as an early model for priesthood invokes ecclesiastical hierarchy and appropriate clerical behavior, a precursor here to the priestly behavior of the Good Samaritan. The text repeatedly encourages us to pull back from such burgeoning possibilities, however, to think of the Old Testament Abraham. For example, we hear Abraham say the truth of Christ’s sacrifice has not yet been revealed to him (“*I leue [believe] þat ilke [same] lord thenketh [intends] a newe law to make,*” 18.264). Yet even this move toward grounding the story in history gestures toward Abraham’s many levels of signification: just his saying “*I leue*” expresses an article of faith, and we are back to considering how the character exemplifies the abstraction. Beyond these possibilities, I have not touched on the liturgical time sequences of these passus. In their architectural, multidimensional grandeur, these passus are perhaps somewhat Dantesque, but they are very Langlandian indeed in their grounded-yet-flexible method of signifying.

Langland’s fluid narrative of the Tree of Charity works by association: one thought leads to another, and the narrative morphs and adjusts according to the progress of Langland’s transformative thought. In Julian’s exemplum of the lord and the servant, by contrast, the outline of the narrative does not change over time, although Julian’s understanding of it does, and that understanding is grounded in two historical moments (the Fall and the Incarnation) that Julian

comes to consider as if they occurred in an abstracted location outside of historical time and place. Her thought comes across as strikingly deliberative, rich in its depth. Nevertheless, Julian holds back a few details from her first telling of the example in order to reveal their significance later, when they can achieve greater effect (the appropriate time). This technique renews the initial narrative but does not lead to new narratives; rather, Julian considers and reconsiders a single narrative for its plenitude of meaning. While her narrative addresses God's actions within and not bounded by time, her deliberation highlights human thought as a construct of time.

Deictics of Timelessness and Placelessness in Julian's Example of the Lord and the Servant

In chapter fifty-one of *A Revelation of Love*, Julian's "example" of the lord and the servant shifts the story of the Fall out of history by abstracting the moment of the Fall and the (historically later) moment of the Incarnation: in her thought experiment, the two exist in parallel, or, more precisely, simultaneously in the same action.⁴⁴ Here I wish to consider how Julian emphasizes the experience of interpretation through the manner in which her narrative unfolds. In the process, she meditates on the implications of the hypostatic union. Her complex exposition puts into play a fluidity of doubleness that engages simultaneous dualities, including how an incomplete understanding at a present moment points to the potential for a full understanding at a future (if repeatedly deferred) moment, how the actions of the servant illuminate a congruity between Adam and Christ, and how the figure of the servant further elucidates what it means to be human by concurrently embodying individual and collective humanity. While it might seem that Julian seeks to approximate the instantaneous manner in which God comprehends history (because she sees Adam, Christ, and all Christians together in the servant at the same time), her way of telling the story also suggests that she is interested in how human understanding develops over time. Her thought experiment investigates the very human *experience* of interpretation, which for Julian, as for her readers, must take place in and through time.

In the narrative, the "example" itself is prompted by Julian's desire to understand what sin is. She has been considering sin and salvation, and recognizes that sin is real. However, in her visions, she has not seen it: "I saw our lord God shewand to us no more blame than if we were as clene [and] as holy as angelys be in hevyn" (50.16–18).⁴⁵ So

she asks God for clarification: “If I take it thus, that we be not synners ne no blameworthy, it semyth [*seems*] as I shuld eryn [err] and faile of knoweing of this soth [*truth*]. And if it be so that we be synners and blameworthy, good lord, how may it than ben that I cannot sen [see] this sothnes in the [you], which art my God, my maker, in whom I desire to sen al trueths?” (50.27–31). The exemplum comes as a response to her desire to know why she cannot see sin. Briefly, her first telling of the story goes like this: she sees a lord sitting on the ground, with a servant standing before him, ready and desirous of doing the lord’s will. The lord sends the servant out, and the servant runs eagerly, but in running falls into a ditch from which he cannot rise. For the servant, the worst experience is that he feels his pain without comfort. All the while, the lord is looking on him lovingly and with comfort, but the servant cannot see that it is so. The lord desires to reward his servant and change his harms into honors, greater ones than the servant would have had if he had not fallen.

The meaning of this narrative is the subject of Julian’s attention throughout her very long chapter fifty-one and the following chapters that consider, among other theologically complex topics, substance and sensuality (which I discussed in Chapter 1) and the trope of Jesus as mother, for which her work is well known. Julian says she understands the servant to be Adam, but notes that certain aspects of the narrative do not quite apply to Adam:

and yet cowth [*could*] I not taken therin ful vnderstandyng to myn ese [*ease*] at that tyme; for in the servant that was shewid for Adam, as I shal seyn, I saw many dyvers [*diverse*] properties that myten be no manner way ben aret [*attributed*] to single Adam [*Adam alone*]. And thus in that tyme I stode mekyl [*much*] in onknowyng [*doubt, “unknowing”*] for the full vnderstandyng of this mervelous example was not goven me in that tyme . . . (51.67–72)

She later comes to see that these puzzling aspects of the story become intelligible if she thinks of Christ as well. The congruity Julian perceives between Christ and Adam in the person of the servant is nevertheless a source of great wonder for her, and in this respect her “example” differs from an exemplum as it might be used in preaching, which could more straightforwardly point toward a moral or behavior to be emulated.⁴⁶ In Julian’s practice, congruity is apt but not so obvious as to be banal, so it requires a certain puzzling through, for which the reward is astonishment and pleasurable wonder at the aptness.⁴⁷ In her view, God writes history like a poet using figurative language, it seems. In this respect, her technique is interesting to consider in conjunction with Aristotle’s views on metaphor, wherein the best metaphors are apt but not obvious, because obvious ones are boring and difficult ones uninteresting.⁴⁸

The key for both Julian and Aristotle lies in similitude and depth:

the deeper one goes into the implications of the example, the more surprising—and pleasing—suitable congruities become. Pleasure is to be found in similarity, but for similarity there must also be difference. As with “figurative” language, where another sense runs in parallel to the “literal” sense, here too the otherness runs pleasingly in parallel, as Julian’s commentary repeatedly reminds us (e.g., “. . . and this was of that other shewyng; and now my vnderstandyng led agen into the first, both kepand in mynd” [51.46–48]). Importantly, much of chapter fifty-one is centered on experiential processing, or comprehension: what and how Julian saw, in and through time, and how she came to understand it. Nevertheless, at this point, “both kepand in mynd” refers to a process *during* the vision, not after it. She presents her vision as an active (rather than passive) reception, an interpretative experience grounded in dualities that help her to further her understanding of the relationship between divinity and humanity.

The “double understandyng” (51.165) of Julian’s interpretative process works much like the cognitive salience and backgrounding I discussed earlier, but her thought seeks a simultaneous processing of figure and ground, a real conceptual challenge.⁴⁹ For example, in the servant she sees “a continuant labourer of leng tyme” (51.182), whom she later identifies as Adam, but at the same time “it semyd that he was anew, that is to sey, new begynnyng to travellyn [working], which servant was never sent out afor[n] [*before*]” (51.183–85), a quality she associates with Christ. Her vision in her present time concerns two previous moments in historical time (the Fall and the Incarnation), as understood with timeless significance. God’s actions in time and Julian’s understanding over time are precisely the issue, in this “example” as well as elsewhere. That point is made consistently throughout the text, as Julian explicitly discusses how she experienced two “shewyng[s]” (51.47) (modes of visionary perception), and how she later came to understand the experience. She calls these “gostly in bodily lyknes” and “more gostly without bodyly lyknes” (51.9–10): a spiritual vision in bodily form, and a more spiritual vision without bodily form.⁵⁰ The line I quoted in my previous paragraph provides another example of Julian setting aside the dichotomy of figure and ground: “. . . and *this was of that other shewyng*; and now my vnderstandyng *led agen into the first*, both kepand in mynd” (emphasis added). The clause “this was of that other shewyng” denotes “more gostly without bodyly lykness” (in this case, the lord’s plans to glorify the servant). The clause “led agen into the first” corresponds to “gostly in bodily lyknes” (the lack of comfort in the prostrate servant).

Later in the chapter Julian refers again to this passage explicitly to collapse the two modes of experience into one moment in time. Having just explained what she understood the lord’s sitting on the

earth to mean and what the colors and qualities of his face and clothing signified (the “this” of the following quotation), she comments on the instantaneous quality of her cognitive processing: “And this was shewid in a touch [instant] wher I sey ‘Myn vnderstandyng was led into the lord,’ in which I saw him heyly enioyen [*greatly rejoicing*] for the worshipful restoring that he wil and shal bring his servant to be [by] his plenteous grace” (51.159–62). Unexpectedly, however, quite a lot else intrudes between her explanation of what she initially perceived and her more precise explanation of what she saw “more gostly without bodyly lykness”: the remainder of the initial “shewyng” (to 51.62); the vanishing of the “shewyng” (51.63) and God’s leading her understanding “in syte [*vision*] and in shewing of the revelation to the end” (51.64); her marveling over what she had seen and aspects she could not understand (51.64–75); three processes that helped her to make sense of the “example,” some of these taking place nearly twenty years after the original showing (51.75–101);⁵¹ the identity of the lord as the Father and the servant as Adam, but Adam in the sense of a man as representative of all of humanity (51.102–17); the beginning of her understanding of how God perceives sin (51.117–22); the meaning of the place in which the lord sat, and of his clothes, and the colors of them, and his demeanor (51.122–59). This long deferral makes the immediacy of “this was shewid in a touch” (51.159) rather a surprise, and certainly necessitates the context she goes on to give (“wher I sey ‘Myn vnderstandyng was led into the lord’ . . .” [51.159–60]). This technique comes across as a circularity of thought that continually leads Julian back to her initial vision, a process of considering and reconsidering that seems to forward her further understanding. Such circularity fits with how many scholars view Julian’s thought. Certainly she presents the process as a ruminative one, and there seems no reason to doubt that it is so. Nevertheless, perhaps of even more interest is the deliberate care with which she reserves a crucial aspect of *how* she experienced what she did, revealing it a considerable time after she tells about the moment she experienced it. Before her nearly twenty years of further thought, at the moment when her experience switched from “gostly in bodily lyknes” to “more gostly without bodyly lykness,” she knew instantaneously quite a number of things about what the vision signified, with respect to God. When she tells about the immediacy of her perception only at this later moment in her text, she highlights the importance of time in human understanding even as she makes the vision itself more memorable; this technique prompts us to go back to reread the moment to which she refers.

Yet a full understanding of the “example” is not available even

then: for Julian, as for Langland, the narrative defers completion, reaching beyond the written words to incorporate the reader's lived experience, and experience-to-come, as part of the story: "This booke is begunne be [by] Gods gift and his grace, but it is not yet performid, as to my syte [sight]" (86.8–9). At the same time as her "shewyng" of the servant draws together significant dualities, she acknowledges the limitations of this mode of understanding, or perhaps of any mode of human understanding. The servant cannot see the lord's loving nature clearly, nor can he perceive how the lord thinks of him ("neither he seith [sees] clerly his lovyng lord, which is to him ful [very] meke and mylde, ne he seith trewly what himself is in the sygte of his lovyng lord," 51.112–14).⁵² At this point she invokes the Pauline *enigma* via the root metaphor UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING, highlighting the role of time in comprehension: "And wel I wote [know], when these ii [the servant's perception of God's nature, and how God views the servant] are wysely and treuly seyn, we shall gettyn rest and peas [peace] her in parte, and the fulhede of the bliss of hevyn, be [by] his plentivous grace" (51.114–17). She later goes on to link comprehension and the experiential present moment with respect to God's gracious response to the limitations of human understanding: "And what tyme that he of his goodnes will shewin hym to man, he shewith him homley [*intimately, with familiarity*] as man; notwithstanding I ne saw sothly, we owen [*ought*] to knowen and levyn [*believe*] that the Fader is not man" (51.143–46).

While the process of reading and rereading marks one important time-based duality at play in the "example," the concept of iterated work—reading and rereading, working and reworking toward the repeatedly deferred clear sight of God—also resonates with the second duality I noted earlier: the servant as Adam and as Christ. Julian sees a doubleness in the labor of the servant, who is both a longstanding retainer accustomed to work (the longevity Julian identifies with Adam) and a new hand being sent out for the first time to begin a work he has not previously undertaken (the newness Julian links to Christ's humanity). Just as she had held back mentioning the instantaneous nature of her experience, she also reserves a detail crucial for understanding this duality. In her initial telling, the lord sends the servant on an unspecified errand. Midway through chapter fifty-one, Julian reveals that the servant goes out after "a tresor in the erth which the lord lovid" (51.185–86). The servant's part in initiating the action is greater in this retelling than in the opening lines of the chapter: the servant seeks this treasure because "The wisdam of the servant saw inwardly that ther was on [one] thing to don which shuld be to the worshipp of the lord. And the servant for love, haveing no reward to hymselfe ne to nothing that might fallen on him, hastily he

stirt [*started*] and ran at the sendyng of his lord to don that thing which was his will and his worship” (51.176–81). This treasure, she finds, “is a mete [*food*] which is lovesome and plesant to the lord” (51.187–88), and so, she says, the servant takes on the hardest sort of labor, working as a gardener.⁵³

The laborious work of the servant is generative and agricultural as well as domestic and hospitable, producing both drink (from “swete flods,” 51.197) and food (“plenteous fruits,” 51.197) for the lord. This passage, so central to Julian’s new understanding of the example, remains intriguingly ambiguous with regard to several important points:

Ther was a tresor in the erth which the lord lovid. I mervelid and thowte what it myte ben. And I was answered in myn vnderstandyng: “It is a mete [food] which is lovesome and plesant to the lord.” For I saw the lord sitten as a man, and I saw neither mete ner drynke wherwith to servyn hym; this was on [one] mervel. Another mervel was that this solemn lord had no servant but on, and hym he sent owte. I beheld, thynkyng what manner labour it myte ben that the servant shud don. And than I understode that he shuld don the gretest labor and herdest travel [work] that is—he shuld ben a gardiner; delvyn [dig] and dykyn, swinkyn [work] and swetyn [sweat], and turne the earth upsodowne, and sekyn [seek] the depnes, and wattir the plants in tyme. And in this he shuld continu his travel and make swete flods to rennen [run], and noble and plenteous fruits to springen, which he shuld bryng afor[n] [before] the lord and servyn hym therwith to his lykyng. And he shuld never turne agen till he had dygte [prepared] this mete al redye as he knew that it lekyd the lord, and than he shuld take this mete [food], with the drinke in the mete, and beryn it ful worshipfully afor[n] the lord. And al this tyme the lord shuld sytten on the same place abyndand [abiding] his servant whome he sent out. And yet I merveylid from whens the servant came; for I saw in the lord that he hath wythyn hymselfe endles lif and al manner of goodnes, save that tresor that was in the erth and that was groundyd in the lord in mervelous depenes of endles love—but it was not all to the worship till this servant had dygte [prepared] thus nobly it, and browte it afor[n] him, in hymself present; and without [surrounding] the lord was nothing but wildernes. (51.185–210, emphasis added)

Similar imagery of fecundity in nature would have been available to Julian from the initial chapters of Genesis, of course, where the topic of agricultural work is introduced (by reference to its lack) *before* the creation of Adam.⁵⁴ I am interested here particularly in three aspects of the servant’s work: his “sekyn[g] the depnes” and “watir[yn]g] the plants in tyme,” and his preparation of the food and drink for the lord.

The first action described as part of the servant’s work is his vigorous and strenuous digging, which leads to or is a part of seeking the deepness, which leads to or is a part of watering the plants in time. All this work causes the “swete flodes” to run, and these, together with the servant’s cultivating, give rise to plentiful fruits. The fruit and water initially might seem to represent sufficient sustenance as found in nature; however, Julian pointedly notes that the servant *prepares* them before he brings both together for the meal. In Sloane but not in Paris, the wording of the description of the meal is strikingly technical: “he shuld take this mete, with the drinke in the mete, and beryn it ful worshipfully afor[n] the lord.”⁵⁵ With Sloane

offering the *difficilior lectio*, “with the drinke in the mete” deserves serious consideration. Julian is working through the doubleness she sees in the servant, transitioning here from Adam to Christ. The details of the meal are not particularly appropriate to Adam except in a general way (perhaps as an Old Testament-style sacrifice), but they *are* appropriate to Christ in a very specific way, a way that relies on food and drink, wells of (cleansing) water, and fruitfulness. If we think through the agricultural work of the servant from the perspective of Christ rather than Adam, the plants nurtured by the servant’s “seeking the deepness” and “watering the plants in time” would correlate to humanity, the courteous gift Julian later envisions the Son giving to the Father (chapter fifty-five). In that context, the “flodes” suggest the very common Christian imagery of the blood and water flowing from the side of the crucified Christ.⁵⁶ While “sekyn[g] the depnes” is turning over the soil according to the “gostely in bodyly liknesse” sense, with respect to the life of Christ the meaning of this action doubles: seeking the experience of being human, where earth signifies human flesh (so seeking deepness is like *pondus amoris*, cf. Langland’s Incarnational “plonte of pees”), and journeying through the depths of hell after Adam and the others (i.e., the harrowing of hell, which comes up just after this [51.226–27], and it is important to remember that in chapter twelve it is Christ’s blood that harrows hell (a “swete flode”?). In chapter twelve, Julian had already drawn attention to God’s creation of flowing water to be used by humanity; close examination of this passage is helpful for considering the similar imagery in chapter fifty-one. While she does not spell out how flowing water is to be used, the context suggests it is for cleansing, and possibly also for drink (“to oure bodily ease”). She compares the created waters to Christ’s blood, which is more efficacious than water:

And after this I saw, beholding, [Christ’s] body plentiously bleding in seming of the scorgyng, as thus: the faire skynne was brokyn ful depe into the tender flesh with sharpe smyting al about the sweete body; so plenteously the hote blode ran oute that there was neither sene skynne ne wound, but as it were al blode. And whan it come wher it should a fallen downe, than it vanyshid; notwitstondyng, the bleding continued a while til it might be sene with avisement [attention]. And this was so plenteous to my sigt that methowte, if it had be so in kind [nature] and in substance [(Aristotelian) “substance”] for that tyme, it should have made the bed al on blode and a passid over aboute. *And than cam to my minde that God hath made waters plentivous in erthe to our service and to our bodily ease, for tender love that he hath to us*, but yet lekyth him better that we take full homely [in a very familiar manner]⁵⁷ his blissid blode to washe us of synne; for *there is no licor*⁵⁸*that is made that he lekyth [likes] so wele to give us; for it is most plentivous as it is most pretious, and that be [by] the vertue of his blissid Godhede. And it is our kinde [nature] and ablissfully beflowyth us be the vertue of his pretious love. The dereworthy blode of our lord Iesus Criste, as verily as it is most pretious, as verily it is most plentivous. Beholde and se. The pretious plenty of his dereworthy blode descendid downe into helle and braste her bands and deliveryd al that were there which longyd [belonged] to the curte [court] of hevyn. The pretious plenty of his dereworthy blode overflowith al erth and is redye to wash al creaturs of synne which be of gode will, have ben and shal ben. The pretious plenty of his dereworthy*

blode ascendid up into hevyn to the blissid body of our lord lesus Christe, and there is in him bleding and praying for us to the Father—and is and shall be as long as it nedith. And evermore it flowith in all hevyns enjoying the salvation of al mankynde that arn there and shal ben, *fulfilling the nomber that failith [completing the number that (now) falls short]*. (12.4–33, emphasis added)⁵⁹

As in chapter fifty-one, in chapter twelve her meditation on the imagery of flowing water leads to her consideration of the harrowing of hell, here effected by the blood of Christ.⁶⁰ This imagery further resonates with her insight regarding Christ's thirst (chapters 17, 31, 43, 75). Indeed, her treatment of Christ's thirst in chapter seventy-five echoes significant imagery from chapter fifty-one, linking God's thirst, his flowing generosity, and his gifts that are treasured and hidden within himself:

Pite in love kepith us in time of our nede, and longing in the same love drawith us into hevyn; *for the threist of God is to have the general man into him, in which thirst he hath drawyn his holy that be now in bliss; and gettand his lively members, ever he drawith and drinkith, and yet he thristith and longith*. . . . And not only we shall recevyn the same bliss the soule aforne have had in hevyn, but also we shall receive anew, *which plenteously shal be flowing out of God into us and fulfillen us*; and this be the goods which he hath ordeynid to geve us from without begynnyng; *these goods are tresurid and hidde in hymselfe*; for into that time, creature is not myty ne worthy to receivin them. (75.7–27, emphasis added)

The phrase “gettand his lively members” perhaps recalls the Pauline body of Christ of 1 Cor. 12, which Julian evokes in chapter fifty-one;⁶¹ in any case, Julian stresses *life* here (“lively members”), in contradistinction to the death from which the blood of Christ rescues Adam (and others).

With this whole imagistic sequence of Julian's thought in mind, the agricultural motivation for the phrase “watering the plants in time” is worth a second look. Julian begins her description of the servant's laborious digging and delving with generative imagery, and continues it with the suggestion of a stark opposition between life and death, since what happens if one does not water plants in time?⁶² Similarly, what happens if one does not eat or drink? The “swete flodes” and “plenteous fruits” ensure that we are cognitively primed to be thinking of the life-saving properties of food and drink, by the time we get to “with the drink in the mete.”⁶³

In its eucharistic implications, “The drink in the food” suggests the furthest extension of what Julian has in mind for the salvific work of the servant, and perhaps anticipates her later reference to Christ dwelling within the soul as “heyst bishopp” (67.10). Such eucharistic implications are borne out by her understanding of the servant as Christ as well as Adam, divinity and humanity conjoined, a revelation she emphasizes in a parallel construction:

In the servant is comprehendid the second person in the Trinite; and in the servant is comprehendid Adam: that is to sey, al man. And therfore whan I say “the Son,” it menyth

[signifies] the Godhede which is even [equal (*in status or quality*)] with the Fadir, and whan I sey “the servant,” it menyth Cristis manhood which is rythful Adam. (51.212–17)

As is typical of Julian’s sensitive treatment of language, “comprehendid” here both suggests how Julian understands (and by extension, her readers ought to understand: “it menyth”), and the expansive significance of what she comes to understand: comprehensive in the sense of all-encompassing, or circumscribing, which is a quality both of the sort of vision she has observed and of God himself. Julian’s technique of holding back detail for this later moment thus reinforces dualities of *experience* while highlighting the distinction between showing and interpretation. That focus on dualities appropriately comes just where she begins to investigate the doubleness of the hypostatic union, divinity and humanity conjoined. Further, she takes the doubleness of the servant to signify both the specificity of a single person (Adam as a distinct human individual; Jesus as an individual living in the world) and the generality of human community, encompassing both “each of us” and “all of us.”⁶⁴ Indeed, she extends the Pauline notion of Christian community as the body of Christ imaginatively, moving beyond “he is the hede and we be his members,” a mode of thought that subordinates parts of the body to its whole, to the more daringly direct assertion that collectively “all mankynd that shal be savid” *are* Christ’s humanity: “. . . all mankynd that shal be savid be [by] the swete incarnation and blisful passion of Criste, al is the manhood of Criste; for he is the hede and we be his members” (51.258–60). In its conceptual breadth and its imagistic malleability, this way of thinking about Christ’s humanity comes close to Langland’s treatment of the figure of Piers Plowman. The brief reframing of the Pauline body of Christ also recalls her earlier insight that “we be his corone” (22.24), the courteous gift of the Son to the Father: the “tresor” (of humanity) the servant sought comes to be transformed to “worshipps” presented to the Father by the Son (and then returned again to the Son from the Father).⁶⁵

To this point I have discussed three dualities Julian perceives in the “example”: how an incomplete understanding at a present moment points to the potential for a full understanding at a future (if repeatedly deferred) moment, how the actions of the servant illuminate a congruity between Adam and Christ, and how the figure of the servant further elucidates what it means to be human by concurrently embodying individual and collective humanity. These have relied on a parallel sort of cognitive processing, “x” alongside “y.” To draw forth the doubleness she perceives in the servant, Julian further emphasizes dualities that not only run in parallel but also point up the Son’s position as mediator, the midpoint between the Father and humanity, a unifying middle.⁶⁶ After she tells the

“example” for the second time, with the new detail of the “tresor,” she repeatedly draws attention to the material substance of the servant’s clothing, or “Adam’s kirtle” (51.252, 51.267, 51.308), which she comes to see transformed into “a fair, semely medlur,” as she calls it, a beautiful and suitable cloth of mixed nature that by the end of chapter fifty-one epitomizes a rich layering of her thought centered on the hypostatic union.

Early in chapter fifty-one, she uses the same word to describe the mingled emotions in the lord’s loving gaze on the prostrate servant: “The fair loking shewid of a semely medlur which was marvelous to beholden: that on was ruth and pety, that other was ioye and bliss” (51.131–33). This duality comes at a moment in the narrative before her insight into the servant as both Adam and Christ, yet anticipates the redemption. She links the “ruth and pety” directly to “the falling of Adam” and the “ioy and bliss” to “his dereworthy Son” (51.136–37). The lord’s mingled yet loving gaze, comprehensive in its understanding as in its completeness (“The merciful beholding of his lofly cher fulfilled al erth,” 51.138–39) accompanies Adam into hell (“and descendid downe with Adam into helle,” 51.139), where Julian momentarily leaves him while she considers God’s gracious response to the limitations of human understanding.⁶⁷ She turns to interpreting aspects of the lord’s demeanor, in the course of which she slips in a reference to the mingled nature of humanity, recalling the creation of “mankynd, which is medlid with erth” (51.152). That “medlid” looks backward in her narrative to the mingled (positive) emotions of the lord, which had also anticipated the historical moment of the Incarnation of “his dereworthy Son,” as we have already seen. Key to her doubled understanding of the servant is the Son’s transformation of humanity, the “tresor” the servant runs to get and prepare to the “worship” of the lord, and she uses “medlur” to reinforce both the link between Adam and Christ and the transformative action of the Incarnation, with the cloth reference imagistically recalling the material, fleshly aspect of humanity.⁶⁸

Let me return here, briefly, to Julian’s introduction of “tresor” into the “example,” for another cluster of imagery important to the incarnate nature of Christ, imagery centered on the earth in which the servant digs as he does his work. We have already seen that Julian associates the created nature of humanity with the earth, following the imagery of Genesis. The work of the servant, recall, was to “delvyn and dykyn, swinkin and swetyn, and turne the earth upsodowne, and sekyn the depnes, and wattir the plants in tyme” (51.194–96). Julian locates a deepness in several other places, notably within the lord himself, in the field where the treasure is to be sought, in the “slade” into which the servant falls, and in hell, where she momentarily leaves

Adam as she continues to consider the details of her vision. As she ponders the nature of the “mete” that is the “tresor,” she perceives a deepness in the lord that is related to the “tresor”:

. . . I saw in the lord that he hath wythyn hymselfe endles lif and al manner of goodnes, save [*except for*] that tresor that was in the erth—and that was groundyd in the lord in marvelous depenes of endles love—but it [*the treasure*] was not all to the worship till this servant had dygte [*prepared*] thus nobly it, and browte it afor him, in hymself present⁶⁹ . . . (51.205–10)

With characteristic care and precision, Julian brings together a series of complicated theological issues here. The “tresor” is not at this point within the lord, but has its foundations in the lord, or is rooted in the lord (perhaps the agricultural lexicon privileges the latter) in a deepness like that the servant is to seek.⁷⁰ As elsewhere, Julian implies interiority with “deepness.”⁷¹ Despite the eucharistic implications of the servant’s action, any language of sacrifice is surprisingly absent here; the emphasis is entirely on the transformation the servant brings about, and the increased honor it correspondingly brings the lord. Like Langland, Julian also draws on the harrowing of hell for imagery that highlights travel over an extreme distance as a means of reinforcing the magnitude of Christ’s action; she not only maps Christ’s “fall” (the Incarnation) onto Adam’s, but also reverses the fall into an ascent, much as Langland does in the “plonte of pees” passage I examined in Chapter 3.⁷² For Julian, the action of the Fall and the action of the Incarnation coincide, emanatively leading to the harrowing: “Gods Son fell with Adam into the slade [*valley*] of the mayden wombe, which was the fairest dauter of Adam, and therfor [*by that*] to excuse Adam from blame in hevyn and in erth; and mytyly he fetchid him out of hell” (51.224–27). It may well be that Julian had the depth of hell in mind when she first worked out the servant’s initial action of “sekyn[g] the depnesse.” Certainly she later reinforces the extreme reaches of hell and of heaven when she describes the Son’s death and resurrection at the end of chapter fifty-one. By this point, her focus is on the servant envisioned as the Son and humanity together; the individuality of Adam has largely dropped away except in her evocations of his clothing (“Adams kirtle”):

And be [*by*] the wallowyng and wrythyng, groning and monyng, is vnderstonden that he myte never rysen al mytyly from the tyme that he was fallen into the maydens wombe till his body was slaine and ded, he yeldyng the soule in the Fadirs hands with al mankynd for whom he was sent.⁷³ And at this poynte he began first to shewen his myte; for he went into helle, and whan he was there he reysid up the grit rote [*great company*]⁷⁴ out of the depe depenes which rythfully was knit to hym in hey hevyn. (51.297–304)

The alliteration emphasizes the immense distance and contrast between hell and heaven (“reysid up the grit rote”; “depe depenes”; “hey hevyn”) even as Julian stresses the unity of Christ and humanity

(“with al mankynd for whom he was sent”). Yet, as I showed earlier with “up” and “down,” in Julian’s usage, the deictics of place tend to model either interiority or hierarchical relationships rather than spatial ones.⁷⁵

In her next chapter, the “mervelous medlur” comes to signify the doubleness of the human condition: fallen with Adam, risen with Christ. It is interesting to note that at this point Julian does not make the comparison directly parallel (Adam to Christ, Adam’s action to Christ’s action), but emphasizes continuity between Christ’s (risen) humanity in parallel with the *result* of Adam’s action:

Al that shal be savid, for the tyme of this life, we have in us a mervelous medlur bothen of wele [joy] and wo. We have in us our lord Iesus uprysen; we have in us the wretchidnes of the mischeffe of Adams fallyng, deyand [dying]. Be Criste we are stedfastly kept, and be his grace touchyng we are reysid into sekir [certain/ reliable] troste of salvation. And be Adams fallyng we arn so broken in our felyng on divers manner, be synes and be sondry peynes, in which we arn made derke and so blinde that onethys [scarcely] we can taken ony comfort. (52.10–18)

Julian takes particular care here to specify that the “mervelous medlur” lasts only “for the tyme of this life.” The mixed condition of humanity offers a sight of God sometimes, and a blindness other times, depending on what God offers, and this vacillation between sight and blindness she describes as rising or falling:

And of his godeness he opynyth the eye of our vnderstandyng be [by] which we have syte, sumtyme more and sumtyme less, after that God gevyth abilitie to takyn. And now we arn reysid into that on, and now we are suffrid to fallen into that other. And thus is this medle [= medlur] so mervelous in us that onethys [scarcely] we knowen of our selfe or of our evyn Cristen in what way we stonden, for the merveloushede of this sundry felyng . . . And yet nevertheles whan this sweteness is hidde, we falyng ageyn into blindhede, and so into wo and tribulation on divers manner. . . . but we grutchin theragen, and duryin [persevere] in peyne and wo, prayand into that tyme that he shewith him agen to us. And thus we stonden in this medlur all the dayes of our life. (52.20–37)

Thus, in her mature thought on the example, Julian ultimately sees each individual Christian in the position of the servant, rising into sight and falling into blindness, particular but general (“we,” not “I”). The medlur is common to humanity but “mervelous” because of Christ, and the close of the passage I just quoted gives something of a nod backward to Adam’s laborious work as a gardener in its modified echoing of God’s curse in Gen. 3:17 (“all the days of your life”).⁷⁶ The way Julian manages the shifting signification of “medlur” seems very similar to the way Langland handles “Piers’s arms” (20.21) as a clothing-based system of imagery. In both cases, the striking imagery enables meditation on the complex relationship among humanity in general, the incarnate Christ, and post-Incarnation humanity.

Finally, while I have treated Julian’s use of the deictics of place already, her deictics of time in the example are especially worth close

attention, particularly in comparison to Langland's. Julian does not situate her example within current historical time as Langland does his narrative, except perhaps insofar as the lord and servant relationship is a social construct of her time. With the deictics of time, Julian moves her "mystye example" beyond a mere similitude. The other-pointing-ness of the servant in the example is not strictly speaking metaphorical or allegorical: the servant does not so much *represent* something on some level other than the narrative one. Nevertheless, the example's implications for Julian's understanding of humanity are grounded, to use the word she favors, in lived reality—Adam's, Christ's, Julian's, her readers'—and the example relies on an overlay of time frames for its cumulative meaning. The servant's dualities have real-world signification tied directly to experiential time.

In this respect, Julian's "example" profits from being set alongside the textually self-aware "Long Charter." In Chapter 3 I noted how the historical-yet-timeless quality of the narrative in the "Long Charter" is justified by recourse to scripture. With its self-reflexive emphasis on biblical texts that tell and foretell the story of Christ, a story also written out directly on and by means of his body, the "Long Charter" draws readers into the narrative in an experiential way, placing them in the position of the passersby addressed by Christ from the Cross via the biblical text "*O vos omnes qui transitis per viam* (Lam. 1:12: "O all ye that pass by the way, attend, [and see if there be any sorrow like to my sorrow: for he hath made a vintage of me, as the Lord spoke in the day of his fierce anger.]"). Readers are invited both to *listen to* the text of the charter (as Christ relates it) and to *read* it (gazing on his body):

hear; understand

<i>Hereþ now and 3e shulle weton</i>	
<i>Hou þis chartre was y wryton</i>	<i>how</i>
.....	
<i>Hou many lettres þer on ben</i>	
<i>Red and þou maist weton and sen Read; know; see</i>	
<i>ffive thousand CCCC fifty and ten</i>	<i>5,460</i>
<i>Woundes on me boþe rede and wen</i>	<i>fair</i>
<i>To shew 3ou alle my loue dede</i>	<i>show</i>
<i>Mi self I w[ill]þe chartre rede</i>	
<i>3e men þat gon forþ by the weye</i>	
<i>Abideth and lokeþ with 3oure ye</i>	<i>eye</i>
<i>And redeþ on pisparchemyn</i>	<i>read</i>
<i>3if eny serwe be lyk to myn</i>	<i>sorrow</i>
<i>O uos omnes qui transitis per viam attendite</i>	
<i>Wiþstondeþ and hereþ þis chartre rad</i>	
<i>Whi I am wounded an al for-blad (emphasis added)</i>	

The association between the Lamentations text and the Crucifixion is an exegetical commonplace also attested in the liturgy for Holy Week.

Here, however, the “Long Charter” poet has added to its effectiveness by smoothly connecting three types of temporality: a moment in historical time, the Crucifixion; a timeless moment, Christ on the Cross envisioning passersby stopping to read the charter; and a present moment, when a reader reads the words “Abideth and lokeþ with 3oure ye / And redeþ on þis parchemyn,” words within the poem that anticipate the words of the poetic charter that follows a few lines later. The transition is so suitable aesthetically that it is easy to overlook the ingenuity that draws attention to writing the charter and reading the charter as actions within or transcending historical time.⁷⁷

To return to Julian’s deictics of time, it is with the servant’s work perceived in the actions of the Son that Julian draws on the fuller implications of the fullness of time, much as Langland does. In the closing section of chapter fifty-one, the focus on *time* and *the appropriate time* escalates, eventually culminating in a series of deictics that cascade to quicken the tempo of her conclusion. When is the appropriate time for the Son to take on humanity? God knows! (when he wills it):

And thus I saw the Son standing, sayeing in his menyng: ‘Lo, my der Fader, I stond befor the in Adams kirtle al redy to sterten and to rennen. I wold ben in the erth to don thy worship *whan it is thy will* to send me. How long shal I desiren?’ *Ful sothfastly [truly] wist [knew] the Son whan it was the Fader will and how long he shal desiren; that is to sey, anempt [with respect to] the Godhede*, for he is the wisdam of the Fader. Werfor this mening was shewid in vnderstandyng of the manhode of Criste; for all mankynd that shal be savid be the swete incarnation and blisful passion of Criste, al is the manhood of Criste, for he is the hede and we be his members; *to which members the day and the tyme is unknown whan every passand wo and sorow shal have an end, and the everlestyng ioy and bliss shall be fulfilled*; which day and time for to se al the company of hevyn longyth. (51.250–63)

Much as with Langland’s “*plenitudo temporis* tyme,” the redemptive time of the Incarnation begins to coincide with the redemptive time of the Crucifixion and Ascension, for by the end of the passage I have just quoted, the longed-for moment is no longer quite the Incarnation itself.⁷⁸ Here, too, is the moment in the narrative when Julian chooses to declare that her understanding of the example is only nascent, “as it were the begynnyng of an ABC, wherby I may have sum vnderstandyng of our lordis menyng; for the privities of the revelation ben hidd therin, notwithstanding that al the shewing arn ful of privities” (51.271–74). The “not yet” quality inherent in the vignette of the Son standing before the Father, longing and thirsting to serve, merges with the “not yet” of humanity longing to experience the fulfillment of the redemption, and with the “not yet” of Julian’s (and the reader’s) experiential understanding. Like Langland, Julian associates the juncture of the divine and the human with emanative action, action that once set into motion cascades into further action:

His stertyng was the Godhede, and the rennyng was the manhede; for the Godhede sterte from the Fadir into the maydens wombe, falling into the taking of our kynde [*nature*]; and in this falling he toke gret sore; the sore that he toke was our flesh in which he had also swithe [*great*] felyng of dedly peynis [pains]. (51.280–84)

Her continuing explication of the vignette leads her to a concise retelling of events from Christ's life, beginning with the Crucifixion as an explanation for the significance of "his kirtle [that] was in poynte to be raggid and rent" (51.292), his death, the harrowing of hell (the "grit rote" passage I discussed earlier), and his transformation of humanity and ascension to heaven as a reversal of Adam's fall but the natural extension of Christ's fall. Once again imagery of clothing predominates, but here the pace of her telling quickens as she winds up her retelling of the example, and of chapter fifty-one, punctuating the transformation she observes by emphatic deictics that locate the lord and the servant, the Father and the Son, in time and space that increasingly merge with a timeless present:

The body was in the grave till Estern morow, and from that tyme he lay never more; for *then* was rythfully endid the walowyng and the wrythyng, the groning and the monyng; and our foule dedly flesh that Gods Son toke on hym, which was Adams old kirtle, steyte [narrow], bare [*threadbare*] and short, *than be our saviour was made fair now*,⁷⁹ white and bryte and of endles cleness, wyde and syde [ample], fairer and richer than was than the clothyng which I saw on the Fadir; for that clothyng was blew, and Christs clothyng is *now of a fair, semely [pleasing/suitable] medlur* which is so marvelous that I can it not discrien; for it is al of very worships. *Now sittith not* the lord on erth in wilderness, *but he sittith* in his noblest sete which he made in hevyn most to his lekyng. *Now stondith not* the Son afor the Fadir as a servant dredfully, unornely clad, in party nakid *but he stondith* afor the Fadir ever rythe [*right in front*], rechely clad in blissfull largess, with a corone upon his hede of pretious richness; for it was shewid that we be his corone, *Now stondith not* the Son afor the Fadir on the left syde as a laborer, *but he sittith* on his Fadirs ryte hand in endles rest and peace. . . . *Now* is the spouse, Gods Son, in peace with his lowid wife, which is the fair mayden of endles ioye. *Now sittith* the Son, very God and man, in his cety in rest and peace, which his Fadir hath adyte to [*prepared for*] him of his endles purpose; and the Fadir in the Son, and tho Holy Gost in the Fadir and in the Son. (51.304–32; emphasis added)

Just as the moment of *plenitudo temporis* shifted from Incarnation to Crucifixion to Ascension in lines 250 to 264 (quoted above), here too Julian shifts her temporal deictics; the historical moment ("then") shifts to the experiential present ("now") as Julian describes the transformation of the "medlur," "our foule dedly flesh," "Adams old kirtle." That experiential present then predominates to punctuate the apt congruity of the transformation as Julian takes to highlighting the contrast between past and present by describing the past only through the filter of the present ("now"): "Now sittith not . . . but he sittith . . . Now stondith not . . . but he stondith . . . Now stondith not . . . but he sittith . . . Now is . . . Now sittith."

In both Langland's Tree of Charity sequence and Julian's example of the lord and the servant, the particulars of the experiential "now"

and the historical “then” prove to be key for thinking through the implications of the Incarnation. Both writers put in play a shifting of time and place that ultimately pops the narrative into an experiential present. There is a suitable aptness to the way in which the topic of time in narrative naturally flows into the topic of the poetic deep structure I wish to consider in the next chapter, whereby the poetic form encodes and enables a layering of understandings over and through time. First, though, I want to look briefly at how one non-narrative example, the lily crucifixion, similarly engages an experiential present to highlight the timeless-yettimebound Incarnational moment.

Images: The Impossibly “Simultaneous” Aspect of Reading “Simultaneous Narration”

When I introduced the lily crucifixion as a brief example of the concept of deep structure, I noted that the simultaneous narration that makes the image so effective leads to an emanative reading of the image.⁸⁰ The lily crucifixion uses the context of the moment of Annunciation to further suggest that the moment of Incarnation ought to be considered in relation to the moment of Crucifixion and to the moment of Resurrection (Figure 4, p. 199). The lily crucifixion presents the Incarnation both historically (as God’s action within time, there/then) and transhistorically (as Christ’s state of being, here/now). Moreover, the relationship the image implies is teleological in an emanative sense—ongoing, as in the leaps of Christ, wherein the Incarnation is the first of several leaps that may be understood to have been initiated by and to flow from that first leap.⁸¹ In the thought of God, of course, such flowings-forth or leaps exist simultaneously; the lily crucifixion itself offers a model for understanding such simultaneity.

The image is therefore especially useful for thinking about time in narrative, in that pictorial simultaneous narration must differ presentationally from narrative. While visual cues in an image suggest the order in which various components ought to be read (placement relative to the center, for example, or differences of scale), visual cues for narrative are perhaps more didactic (begin at the beginning and end at the end). While human perception can still only focus on one portion of the whole at a time in either case, an image perhaps suggests more seductively (if misleadingly) that a whole is being presented at once. The distinction makes me think of a card “trick” we used to play as children: you ask your victim to select several cards

randomly from the deck without showing them to you, and then you reintegrate the cards into the deck without looking at them. To set up the joke (it is not really a trick), you ask, “would you like them all at once or one at a time?” and if the answer is “one at a time,” you quickly flick individual cards at the person until the deck is depleted (or until they cannot stand it any more, usually before the tenth card); if “all at once,” you throw the whole deck. The end result is the same, of course, and the joke lies in the disjuncture between the expectation that *only* the selected cards will be forthcoming and the actual non-trick of bombardment with all cards without selection. Nevertheless, that nondistinction between “all at once” and “one at a time” sticks in my head as being comparable to the theological point to be made by simultaneous narration in the context of Incarnation: to consider God’s perception, “all at once” makes the most sense, from a reader’s, it is “one at a time,” but the reality of the hypostatic union is the same in either case. Moreover, both card “trick” and image leave to the experiencer the work of recognizing that “all at once” is also “one at a time.” Because of the nature of the hypostatic union, the focus on time in the lily crucifixion really is different, and more theologically significant, than most instances of simultaneous narration would be: the emanative relationship is an important aspect of what is to be read in the image. So in this case, simultaneous narration does more than set episodes from a narrative alongside one another.

In this regard, I find it useful to consider an interesting case of an art historian thinking about metaphor theory to articulate his method of reading a different medieval image with theological implications, the Man of Sorrows. Bernhard Ridderbos draws on the work of philosopher Max Black to consider how “versions of the Man of Sorrows do not represent theological concepts directly, but rather refer to existing representations, between which a certain tension has been created as properties from them have been selected and fused into a new *Gestalt*.”⁸² Ridderbos is interested in the way the Byzantine image of the Man of Sorrows is generated by “fusing into one image elements from the representation of the crucified Christ and the representation of the Pantocrator. These two representations had certain features in common which made such a fusion possible. The fusion of the two presentations had also as a consequence that certain elements were excluded”⁸³ Such a fusion of “a primary and a secondary subject” that are “two iconographical themes representing antithetical theological concepts” is analogous to what happens in metaphor, he feels:

The relationship between these two subjects can be compared to the way the subjects of a metaphorical statement are related to each other, although there seems to be a difficulty here: in a metaphorical statement the link between the two subjects depends on the

distinction between literal and figurative language. Such a distinction cannot be applied to pictorial images; instead, it can be said that the “metaphorical” character of images of the Man of Sorrows depends on the distinction between conventions of realism and symbolism as these existed at the time the images were produced.⁸⁴

For this way of thinking about metaphor, the components of comparison are inherently abstract and conceptual (in this case, theological) rather than imagistic; Ridderbos is interested in a fusion of “*antithetical* theological concepts” (emphasis added), rather than of images per se. Nevertheless, he goes on to make a distinction between pictorial fusions and linguistic ones:

A fundamental difference, however, exists between the images of the Man of Sorrows and metaphorical statements: in the latter the interaction of the two subjects has to be enacted by the hearer or the reader; the beholder of an *imago pietatis* is confronted with the results of this process. This difference implies that the starting point of the beholder of such an image is opposite to that of the hearer or reader of a metaphorical statement: whereas the hearer [or] reader has to start from the subjects in order to decide which of their properties can be matched, the beholder has to start from the properties which have been fused into one image in order to decide to which subjects they belong.⁸⁵

While I am not altogether convinced that the process of reading an image of the Man of Sorrows is different from the process of generating meaning in metaphor in the way he describes, Ridderbos raises an interesting issue in asserting that the beholder must split out fused properties while a reader generates the conceptual fusion from “subjects” that are compared on the page. In his further thoughts on how experiential reading of a theologically informed image works, he raises issues remarkably similar to Julian’s:

As regards the Man of Sorrows, the relationship between evoking a personal devotional response on the part of the beholder and conveying a theological message can be clarified now with the help of our knowledge of the structure of this image. The beholder was confronted with an unusual combination: a dead figure in an upright position. With the help of other properties such as the Cross and the displaying of only half the figure, the beholder was to realise that some elements belonged to the theme of the crucified Christ and some to that of the Pantocrator. He had to conclude that this representation contained an image of the crucified Christ as an image of the Pantocrator and he had to ask himself why these images were connected in such a way. The answer was that in a theological sense the crucified Christ is the Pantocrator. Thus the delivery of the theological message of the image depended on the self-activity of the recipient.

Such an outline of the reactions expected from the beholder is schematic and suggests—wrongly—that the image was merely a riddle which had to be solved. The situation is actually quite different from that of a riddle, the characteristic of which is that as soon as the answer has been found, it is no longer interesting and in fact no longer exists. The identification of the properties of the Man of Sorrows, their relations to certain subjects and the relationships between these subjects, should not be seen as a purely cognitive activity the challenge of which was for one occasion only. The intriguing doubleness of the image could be experienced again and again.⁸⁶

While the experience of reading an image cannot be precisely the same as the experience of reading text, it is interesting to note that the sort of imagistic compressed metaphor Ridderbos describes seems

closer to Julian's textual example than to the lily crucifixion's visual one, in part because the latter's simultaneous narration *does* break out episodes from Christ's life even as it encourages that emanative holistic reading.

In the chapter that follows, I am interested precisely in how readers are prompted to compare textual moments that are related thematically but occur at different times within the narrative, in some cases at quite a distance from one another. From considering temporal fluidity in narrative, and the compression of episodically distinct moments presented as if part of one action ("all at once"), I now move to the larger poetic structures that form an Incarnational poetic, that are both generated by and seek to represent, in their iterating pattern, the "middleness" or suffusing presence of the incarnate Christ.

Chapter 5

“He is in the mydde point”: Poetic Deep Structure and the Frameworks of Incarnational Poetics

... for he is in the mydde poynt of allthyng and all he doith . . .
—*A Revelation*, 11.21–22

What, I say, is this word, formable and not yet formed, except something of our own mind which we cast this way and that by a kind of revolving motion, according as we think now of this and now of that thing, just as they are found, or as they occur to our mind?
—*De Trinitate*, 15.15.25

And whon god wolde · he went his way
And þenne was sprad · þe Flourdelys
—“*Flourdelys*,” ll. 55–56

FROM THE TOPIC of time within narrative, this chapter moves to the large-scale structural forms that lie at the heart of an Incarnational poetic. When John Capgrave sought “to uttir pleylnly in langage of oure nacion, / Swech straunge doutes that long to the Incarnacion,” he wanted to articulate both clearly and fully.¹ When I discussed Capgrave in my introduction, I focused primarily on vernacularity and historical moment, only briefly raising the issue of poetic form, which I wish to consider here more extensively. In an Incarnational poetic, the capacity of language to express fully, making manifest more than it says directly, hinges in part on the kinetic power of interpretative leaps that transcend time-bound constraints of narrative. While a narrative presents itself teleologically from a start to a finish, or at least progresses from first words to last, the potency of a “full word” lies in the off-the-page process by which a reader mulls over the resonance of words or imagistic patterns and ponders referents that point away from local contexts even while signifying within them. This process is a natural part of reading of any sort, of course, but offers special possibilities in an Incarnational context, as I noted earlier with respect to Augustine’s use of the word “word.”² A “full word” relies on concerted attentive thought, processed in and through

time, and also on brief flashes of insight, the glimpses of Augustine's "true word" perceived momentarily "through this mirror and in this enigma," or as Hilton puts it, the glimmerings of the city of Jerusalem seen from afar as pilgrims travel toward it at night.³ The systemic aspect of a poetic thus resides in relational thought; here, I am interested in a layering of understandings in and through time—a layering that enables an approximation of the ineffable, or as near as language and thought may come to it. For these writers, since God's understanding is instantaneous and comprehensive while human understanding is timebound and partial, writing and reading instantiate a way of knowing, a process of understanding, a means to an end. Such mediation models, with human language, in poetical forms, the mediation of the Logos (but cannot replicate it). No wonder, then, that an Incarnational poetic may stress Christ's humanity as not only a way (cf. John 14:6) but also a means, and a mean or middle point.

One formal strategy writers embraced was to treat Christ's earthly life as both a historical period of time and a sort of shorthand for salvation history, shorthand that simultaneously points backward to the beginning of time (Creation) and forward to the end of time (the eschaton). Such a tactic, perhaps usefully thought of as a meditation on God's power to transcend time, may be enacted in the structural form of written works by placing a special focus on the Incarnation as initiating the events of Christ's human life, with the Passion as a pivot that points toward the eschaton. As a good and fundamental beginning, the Incarnation sets in motion the events of Jesus' life that enable salvation. I noted earlier that fourteenth-century writers meditate on transformations of Christ's human body in and through time, such as I described in relation to "love deed" and the deictics of salvation in the "Long Charter."⁴ In their textual histories as well as their themes, the works I have drawn together in this study also exemplify experiential understanding gained over and through (historical or poetic) time: three of them are among the small number of works from the period that show the repeated engagement of one individual rethinking over time (*Piers Plowman*, *A Revelation*, *The Scale*),⁵ while another was worked and reworked in successive versions as it was repeatedly copied and altered by its medieval readers (the "Long Charter"). (Perhaps because of their brevity and relative scarcity, the botanical lyrics bear fewer traces of considered thought over time.) The process of thought, a working through of understanding, is key to the dynamic of an Incarnational poetic.

Before turning to specific examples, in keeping with the multiple registers these works invoke, I offer three concepts adapted to my purpose as ways of thinking about what medieval writers are doing

when they instantiate an Incarnational poetic: from philosophy, Augustine's "formable word," revolved in and over time to become a "true word"; from literary criticism, John Burrow's "eddy[ing] back" of sense, a redundancy in alliterative verse; from transformational grammar, "deep structure," wherein the systemic nature of meaning permeates a whole. All three embrace the concept of tapping into underlying meaning that transcends a single moment or image; they also all recognize cognitive processing's need for time, over time, to come to a layering of understandings.

"Deep structure" has become something of a meme in academia across a wide range of disciplinary fields, in some cases even being used as a meme that describes the quality of being a meme.⁶ Even though the term has been overused in recent thought, I rely on it because medieval writers, while differing sharply in their implementation of systemic structure, share a presumption of the fundamental truth of an emanative Logos that acts in and through historical and poetical time, and that presumption suffuses their work. Moreover, for an Incarnational poetic, the *deepness* of deep structure points toward not only systemic unity but also the theological magnitude of and conceptual challenge posed by the union of God and humanity, such as Julian engages when she describes the Incarnational digging of the servant as "seeking the deepness."⁷ As a unifying whole underlying specific linguistic instances, the concept of "deep structure" is also nearly analogous to the concept of "conceptual metaphor."

Recall that in *De Trinitate*, Augustine defines a technical sense of the word "word" in order to generate an analogy that would link human language to the Logos. Augustine's project of describing how the human mind contains created trinities in the image of the uncreated Trinity ends with projections of thought overlaid through time, the only approximation of the ineffable available, according to Augustine, in this life. The analogy relies on Augustine's concept of an existing yet formable pre-thought word, revolving over time:

What is that which can be a word, and, therefore, is already worthy of the name of a word? What, I say, is this word, formable and not yet formed, except something of our own mind which we cast this way and that by a kind of revolving motion, according as we think now of this and now of that thing, just as they are found, or as they occur to our mind? And it then becomes a true word when that which we cast, as I have said, by a revolving motion, arrives at that which we know, and is formed by it by taking its perfect likeness, so that as any thing is known, so it is also thought, so it is spoken in the heart, that is, without sound, without the thought of sound, such as certainly belongs to some language. (15.15.25)⁸

The "true word" ("*verum verbum*"), as Augustine calls it, is a sort of abstract something-before-thought informed by an innate knowledge of God present within the mind, a "word," that is, informed by the

post-Fall remnant of the image of God within human reason.⁹ By a “revolving motion,” the mind imposes form, informed by a true form or divine Truth, on thought. Such “revolving” requires thought, over time, to conform a “word” to “the Word,” the Second Person of the Trinity. In Augustine’s model, such revolving and informing are aspects of interiority, taking place within the mind itself. While such layering is also the strategy of an Incarnational poetic, in the latter the forms are both linguistic and in a larger sense structural, since the written words of literary works must be placed, one after another, on the page to form the whole: words may point backward and forward, but only in memory, in the fullness of time, can the structure be glimpsed all at once.

While such retellings operate as an underlying structure of the poem, they also offer a continuing reevaluation of a conceptual challenge, a series of changes rung over one theme that connects to other recurring themes. This process of working over and back, retaining some constants while altering certain variables, sustains its own fluid dynamic, a sort of ebb and flow that models and remodels the Incarnational moment. Movement within a framework enacts an “eddy back of sense,” where the present retelling of the Incarnation gestures backward to previous retellings and in a directionless way toward a divine reality. I have borrowed the concept of “eddy back” from John Burrow, who used it in a pejorative sense as he sought to explain how alliterative poetry can be unproductively constrained by its own form: “[alliterative poets] seem to rely on the intrinsic interest of the alliterative line and language to hold the audience’s attention, as if, sometimes, the mere display of the words were enough. The sense is continually being forced to eddy back in order to include another synonym.”¹⁰ For Burrow, eddy back is a flawed redundancy of sense intended to generate sound clusters at the expense of simplicity or directness. The constraints of the alliterative line might encourage a listing of places that begin with the letter “g” in order to fill out the meter, for instance, or, to use the example put forward by Burrow: “We are told three times that Youth was a man, twice that he was warlike, twice that he sat on a horse, and once that he intended to ride it,” all in the space of four relatively brief alliterative lines from *The Parlement of the Thre Ages*.¹¹ Burrow suggests that superabundance, in this case, is not meaningful; in his view, the reiterated concepts appear randomly except with respect to the alliterating sounds.

An Incarnational poetic encourages such eddy back of sense for patterning that *adds* meaning through repetitions introducing variety. In poems that engage the topos of the leaps of Christ, for example, each leap signals a reaffirmation of that first leap into the womb, a

sort of rebirth of commitment, on God's part, to his plan of salvation—a reinforcing iteration of the flowing forth of his love. Once the pattern of leaps has been established, readers expect fulfillment of the form. The fulfillment is not simply in the repetition of the leaping action, but in the way the events metaphorically represented by the leaps are actions linked by their common (emanative) foundation. Patterns, and their fulfillments, and their alterations, are there to be seen if readers are alert to them. The evocative power and elusive meaning of “true love,” for example, similarly derive from both the fulfillment and the denial or deferment of expectations suggested by generic or topical forms, as I showed in Chapter 2.

In this chapter, I consider poetic deep structure with particular attention to the three image groups I earlier identified as recurring in late medieval English writing: Christ's body as *language or writing*, as *clothing or enwrapment*, and as *botanical growth or life force*. My discussion is representative rather than exhaustive; other works contemporary to these would profitably be considered in light of such poetic frameworks. Space does not permit me to look in equal depths at all poems, nor can I give the longer works the sustained attention their intricate structures and complex concerns merit; proper treatment of *Piers Plowman*'s Incarnational poetic would require a book in itself. Nevertheless, as I show, for writers who engage the Incarnation at a structural level in their own writing, isolated metaphor or imagery may be an important means for expressing the mystery of God's taking on human nature but cannot be the only means: the Incarnation manifests itself repeatedly in their work, sometimes in subtle ways, often in fundamental structures of the poem as a whole. When such Incarnational forms occur together within a work, they may be seen to generate an Incarnational mode; their meaning lies not primarily in the form itself, in the verbal pattern, but in the interpretive leaps inherent to an Incarnational poetic. Such layering works because of intersections between form and expectations aroused by form.

Lordship, Kingship, and the “Long Charter of Christ”

In Chapters 2 and 3, I examined specific aspects of the form of the “Long Charter.” While this poem has generally been treated as an example of Passion poetry,¹² I have been describing it as Incarnational. The two are not necessarily mutually exclusive, of course, but it is worth considering why I see the Incarnation as paramount in the poem's system of thought when others have focused

on the Passion. How do we know an Incarnational poetic when we come across one, when Incarnation and Crucifixion often are both given considerable attention in the same poem, and indeed the Incarnational imagery appears understated? The answer must lie in poetic form.

As I previously noted, in the A-text of the “Long Charter,” a double Incarnational metaphor of lordship spans the entire poem, twinning two predominant views of Christ’s human flesh: as parchment for his charter (ll. 54, 78–80) and as the cloth of the lord’s *côte armure* (215–24). The center of the poem pivots on the third Incarnational image group, botanical growth or life force: the “trewe loue,” a plant plenteously growing in nature, is named in the charter as the rent due as well as the means to salvation, to be sought (and found) in Christ’s side (120–30). This botanical imagery further coincides with the cloth-based imagery of lordship at the end of the poem, where Christ’s wounds are transformed into roses in his *côte armure* (221), this heraldic device being the sign by which humanity is to recognize him as lord. Botanical and clothing imagery is additionally brought together with the charter motif, as Christ says his charter (his body) will be read out loud at the end of time. I discussed all this in Chapters 2 and 3.

Because this poem is not generally well known, a more detailed paraphrase would be useful to tease out how its Incarnational form manifests itself. The poem is presented as an address of Christ (the “I” of the poem), who is hanging on the Cross, to passersby, or collective humanity (“[m] an and womman,” 2), epitomized by the reader/listener (the “you” of the poem). Christ identifies himself as “kyng of heuene and helle” (1) who, for love of humanity, came down from heaven to give his inheritance/land (“erytage,” 11) to homeless wandering humanity, who were previously driven out of “ioye” (5) through the devil’s treason.¹³ To forestall a challenge to the gift, he took seisin (possession of land), being kept “dernely [*secretly*]” (17) by a virgin for forty weeks less five days in order “to fulfulle þe olde lawes” (20).¹⁴ Envious Satan puts him to the trial with pride, covetousness, and envy because “wel he wiste [*knew*] I was a man” (31), but finding no sin in him, sends his servants against him “with maystrye [*armed force*]” (35) to kill him. Yet Christ has in mind to make humanity more secure by confirming his seisin with a deed of gift, “a chartre of feffement” (42). Christ’s description of his own condition for more than thirty years before his deed was done (i.e., his human lifetime on earth) parallels humanity’s wandering and poverty at the opening of the poem. Too poor to afford parchment, he gave his own skin, as love prompted him to do. To obtain friends, as the poor do, he gave a supper. Before he rose from the table, he was betrayed

by a friend. He had “a kirtel . . . and clopes mo” (67), which he had to give up; those who wrote the charter cast lots to see whether one person would get all garments or they should be divided among several.¹⁵ Everyone, friend or foe, deserted him. He was pinned to a pillar, stretched to dry in the sun, as parchment ought to be. Hear and see, Christ says, how the charter was written: Jews spat on his face (the ink); the scourges were the pens, the 5,460 wounds on his body the text. He calls on passersby to read the charter (“O *vos omnes*,” 96a) and then reads out the text of the charter himself, with the particulars I previously examined in detail, including the rent of the “trewelou” (126) and the five seals. He notes that he has taken the Crown of Thorns on his head “in token þat I am kyng / and frely may 3yuon my þyng” (153–54). The Jews were witnesses; the sealing took place between two thieves. For his thirst, he requested “a loue drynk” (167), he says, but received “eyssel and galle” (168).¹⁶ Additional witnesses were Matthew, John, Luke, Mark, his mother, and many others. Mary did not want to cry before the charter was completed but often said “alas.” He was so poor that he had nothing to give in his will except his mother; he gave her to his “cosyn” [John] (181). With his word “*consummatus*” (187) he completes the charter, declaring humanity has overcome its foe, Satan, to whom he goes to show the deed. He writes out a covenant with Satan, specifying that he will take his “catel [*movable goods*]” (195) that Satan falsely stole through “fray [*assault, breach of the peace*]” (196). He returns to make another feast, known as Easter, lasting forty days. To make the “you” of the poem always “syker [*secure, safe, confident*]” (206), he leaves an indenture—his flesh and blood in the hand of the priest—and also a token that may be carried about (the cross). He must return to his father, having done his will, and takes along his coat of arms, which he took from humanity’s livery (another passage I examined earlier in detail).¹⁷ It was made for him by a very beautiful maiden. He brought it out of her bower; it is spangled with five roses, the wounds to which he dealt a death blow. When he comes again, you may recognize him by this heraldic device. At that time, when the charter is read, those who have not paid their rent will be very afraid: they will go to hell, those who have paid will return to heaven with him. Pay your rent and claim your inheritance at will.¹⁸

This brief summary brings to the fore several further points about the poem’s form, points that both illuminate the poem’s Incarnational deep structure and provide some clues to the interests, and perhaps background, of the poet who wrote the A-text of the “Long Charter.”¹⁹ On close examination, it is evident that the poet is deeply invested in the sacramental and liturgical aptness of his imagery, that he uses legal terminology and liturgical passages with exceptional care, that

he might have known law French, and that later revisers of his poem were not everywhere attuned to the fine points of his phrasings. His attention to form belies the usual critical dismissal of this poem's aesthetics as being of interest only for the charter metaphor.

First, beyond the twinning of charter and *côte armure*, several parallel structures are in play. Perhaps the most obvious of these is the pairing of the Last Supper and Easter, a pairing the poet derives from the liturgy for Holy Week and emphasizes by treating each event at considerable length in about the same number of lines at roughly similar distances from the beginning (fifty-five lines in) and the end of the poem (thirty lines back):²⁰

To gete me frendes I 3af god mede *meed*
 So doþ þe pore þat haþ gret nede
 Vn a thoresday a soper²¹ y made
 Boþe frend and fo to maky glade
 Wiþ mete and drynk to soule fode
 Wiþ holy word my flesch and blode
 This I made for mankynde
 Mi loue dedis to haue in mynde
Hoc facite in meam commemoracionem
 A-gayn y com and made a feste
 Among þe leste and þe meste
 Aparty þo men gonne knowe me
 That I was man of gret pouste
 That feste lestep fourty dawes
 To do men knowe my newe lawes
 That feste was of ioye and blis
 That esterday 3et y-cleped ys
 On endenture I lafte wiþ þe
 That euere þou sholdest syker be
 In prestes hond my flesch and blod
 That for þe dyed vp-on þe rod

*Do this in memory of me*²²
feast
least; most
openly
power

Easter day; called
indenture; left
safe/secure

cross

For a poem that so tenaciously imagines and re-imagines transformations of Christ's body, it is perhaps not surprising to find such attention to Christ's institution of the eucharistic celebration at the Last Supper. The poet makes a point of mentioning the day of the week—here not so much a historical reference as a liturgical one (Holy Thursday commemorates the establishment of the sacrament). He lingers over the doctrinal point that Christ's body is "mete and drynk" (59) yet human "flesch and blode" (60), a correspondence reinforced by the reiterated "wiþ" (59, 60) that draws attention to Christ's action in establishing the sacrament and underlines the importance of the point. This celebratory meal ("to maky glade") is of "soule fode."²³ By including the words of the consecration in Latin (62a), the poet not only situates the moment in historical time (the Last Supper) but also points toward the timelessness of its power (every mass, everywhere, at all times), much as we saw him do with

“love deed.” In fact, he also reiterates “love deed” here (62, this time in the plural), subtly reinforcing the charter imagery even as he highlights the eucharistic message. “This I made for mankynde” (61) emphasizes Christ’s agency in establishing the sacrament: “*this*” is the sacrament, “*this*” is his body broken, “*this*” is the “love deed”; “do *this* in memory of me.”²⁴ Yet the charter motif adds further complexity. In Cooling Castle’s charter poem, as I showed, “Thys is chartre and wytnessyng” pointed to the material reality of the castle itself.²⁵ Here, too, “This I made for mankynde / Mi loue dedis to haue in mynde / *Hoc facite in meam commemoracionem*” points to material reality: Christ’s body in the Eucharist, of course, and also as the parchment on which “loue dedis” are inscribed, which Christ has invited the reader/viewer to read precisely to keep his “love deed” in mind. Remembering, in fact, is a condition of the gift (“To haue & to holden withouten mysse / In a condicioun 3if þou be kynde / And my loue dedes haue in mynde,” 112–14), a condition Christ restates at the end of the poem (226), together with the other condition (pay the rent of “trewe loue”):

Tho þat ben of rente be-hynde
 An þuse dedes haue no3t in mynde
 Sore may þeyer ben a-drad
 Whan þis chartre shal ben rad. (225–28)

*afraid
 read*

Elsewhere in the poem, the poet postulates *thought* as the first step to action: he depicts Satan plotting against Christ (“harde he þratte [*menaced*] me in his þou3t / That sesyng sholde ben dere a-bou3t / he sente his seruante3 with maystrye . . . ,” 33–35), and Christ already having a response planned:

Wel he fond hym geyned no3t
 A-nother help *was in my pou3t*
 More syker þe to make
 Ageyn þi fo ful of wrake
 Heuene and erthe in present
 To make a chartre of feffement (emphasis added)

Christ’s command to remember his “loue dedis” offers a first step toward “trewe loue”; the communal commemoration of the mass offers a means for putting that charity into practice.

Like the imagery of the charter and *côte armure*, the passage on the Easter feast, coming near the end of the poem, reinforces Jesus’ status as a lord who wields power (“Aparty þo men gonne knowe me / That I was man of gret pouste,” 199–200). It further testifies to his kingship by highlighting his legislative power (“To do men knowe my newe lawes,” 202). The poet initially relies on the reader’s knowledge of scripture to link this line back to the rent of “trewe loue”: what are

the new laws, we might wonder? A moment's thought suggests the New Testament's love command: love God, and love your neighbor as yourself (Matt. 22:37–39). Then, intriguingly, the passage links back to the Last Supper passage not just eucharistically but via the charter metaphor: the communion wafer, elevated at the moment of consecration, recalls Christ's "love deed" in more than one sense here, since Christ identifies it not as bread but as an indenture, the grantee's copy of the deed of gift. The structural placement of this indenture within the narrative richly extends the connections the poet has established among the breaking of bread at the Last Supper, Christ's flesh and blood in eucharistic celebration, and the sacrament's infinite replicability that joins its participants in charity. "In prestes hond my flesch and blod" (207), the indenture recalls the words of consecration spoken toward the beginning of the poem, again linking the moment when Christ instituted the sacrament, an historic moment in time and in the early life of the church, with any and all celebrations of the sacrament itself—any day, any hour, any place.²⁶

The complexity of the poet's thought comes across in other subtle formal ways. He pairs "þe olde lawes" (20) that are satisfied by his possession of humanity/gestation in the womb, for example, with "my newe lawes" (202) that the Easter feast makes known—the New Testament covenant of love that replaces the Old Testament covenant of law and, as the charter conceit shows, carries the force of law. He seems to draw on the same imagistic tradition the *Ancrene Wisse* and *Piers Plowman* do in thinking about the Old Testament as sealed letters and the New Testament as letters patent (unsealed new legislation promulgated by a king): at Easter, Christ presides *in person* over the feast that lasts forty days "To do men knowe my newe lawes" (202), a tangible broadside, if you will, to be read by all, the text of the charter still visible on the parchment of his skin.²⁷ Like the pairing of the Last Supper and Easter, the old laws and the new appear at roughly similar distances from the beginning and ending of the text, twenty lines in and thirty-two lines back.

Not all pairings in the poem offer such a framing effect. The poem's first image of poverty, humanity expelled from Eden, is presented with animal imagery: "Pore þou were dryuon a-way / as a best þat goþ on stray" (7–8). After the Last Supper, Christ describes his betrayal as an attack by a lion: "He [Judas] fond me goyng in þe way / As þe lyon goþ tyl his pray / *Susceperunt me sicut leo paratus ad predam*" (65–66a, Ps. 16:12). While Christ's act of traveling is portrayed as more purposeful than humanity's errant wandering, the two passages are linked by more than just the animal imagery. The poet contrasts humanity's poverty with Jesus' kingship, announced in the first line ("Thesu kyng of heuene and helle") and again

immediately following the expulsion from paradise, when Christ descends “ffro my rych” (9) in response to humanity’s plight. Jesus increasingly takes on that poverty, only to reverse it through his gift of a share of his inheritance.²⁸

Although the verse form of the “Long Charter,” with its short lines, may tempt us at times to read quickly, passing over potential complexities, the poem relies on our bringing to it an understanding of its devotional and liturgical resonances, just as it relies on our knowing something about diplomatics. Yet the poem’s main appeal is not to affect, nor to pain, nor blood, nor passion. Read imagistically, the charter metaphor draws attention to the Passion, to be sure. Read formalistically, the Incarnational framework prompts a closer look at the poem’s entire system of imagery. The opening and closing of the poem focus strongly on Christ’s humanity, as received from Mary: “To a mayde I demytted me” (15); “I ne hadde wher to take / My testament wherof to make / But of [*except from*] my moder lef and dere” 177–79) and “A cote armure I bar wiþ me / ffor þat I tok of þy leuere / . . . / A wel fayre mayde to me it wro3t” (215–19). The poet never loses sight of Christ’s body, through its transformations and replications. Each new vision is integrally linked in through the developing metaphors of *côte armure* and charter. The images operate on a physical level (skin to parchment to bread to cloth that is actually skin) and a legal level (“sesyng” to charter to indenture to badge of office), always centering on Christ’s flesh, circling through manifestations of the deed of gift. Twinned views of Christ’s skin as parchment and cloth form the poem’s skeleton, intersecting at two moments in historical time, the Crucifixion and Last Judgment, as well as at moments in poetic time, the middle and end of the poem itself. More than an extended treatment of a memorable visual image, the “Long Charter” demonstrates the poet’s interest in theological ramifications of the Incarnation (the seals as Trinity and hypostatic union) and in aesthetic possibilities of interweaving Latin scripture with a vernacular narrative (melted sealing wax paired with “*factum est cor meum*”), in inheritance as well as land tenure, in obligations of lordship as well as the signs by which obligations are publicly acknowledged, and in the intersections between two strongly developed metaphors. In the “Long Charter,” all such interests are embedded within a structural underpinning characteristic of an Incarnational poetic, revolving in this case around transformations of Christ’s physical body. The poet demonstrates his intellectual appreciation of how the pieces fit together: passion, and Eucharist, and liturgy, and charity *in relation to* kingship, lordship, and emanation.

By contrast, we might usefully consider the lyric F. J. Furnivall

prints in his compilation of poems from the Vernon manuscript as “A lytel tretys of Loue. Of godes passyon.” This poem is framed around an initial complaint similar to that of the “Long Charter”:

Ihesu Crist, þat is so fre,	<i>noble</i>
To Monnes soule spekeþ he:	
“Ichaue,” he seiþ, “I-weddet þe,	<i>married</i>
And in my honden I-writen þe.	
“Al þat in þis world is ou3t,	<i>anything [i.e., exists]</i>
ffor þi loue I-chaue hit wrou3t;	<i>I have</i>
And siþen after so deore þe bou3t	<i>then; dearly</i>
þat of my lyf ne rou3te I nou3t.	<i>cared</i>
“What miht I more don þen þis:	
þen comen out of my ffader blis	
And suffren mony a schome, I-wis,	<i>shower of blows; indeed</i>
ffor to bringe þe to blis?	
“Þritti wynter on eorþe I 3ode . . .” (1 – 13) ²⁹	<i>thirty; went</i>

Here the bridal imagery derived from the Song of Songs predominates. The focus on Incarnation is notably absent, as are liturgical and imagistic complexities of the sort I have been tracing. That lack is especially apparent in passages that share some imagery with the “Long Charter.” For instance, the “Long Charter” poet’s masterful meditation on “trewe loue” derives from, but goes well beyond, the tradition of lover-knight complaints such as the one voiced in “A lytel tretys”:

Loke what wolt þou 3elde me	<i>give</i>
ffor al þat Ichaue don for þe!	
Non oþer þing kep I of þe	<i>only</i>
But onliche þat þou loue me. (65–68)	

The “Long Charter” is especially noteworthy, then, in part because one of the tropes is a literary imitation of a legal document, generating the expectation that formulaic features of that type of document will reappear in the imitation. More intriguingly, however, the poem merits close attention because of its Incarnational deep structure. The poem’s twinned metaphors of lordship make meaning from our expectations of a particular documentary form (the charter) and literary form (lyric with elements from romance and *geste*) in a relatively brief narrative, yet offer meditative potential beyond the confines of the story told here.

The scope of the “Long Charter” makes a close reading of the sort I have just offered manageable. I turn now to Hilton’s *Scale of Perfection*, which is a much longer work, written in prose. It begins as an instructional manual for contemplation, written, Hilton says, for an anchoress who is just beginning in her life as a professed religious. Book 2, written some time later than Book 1, continues in a different

vein stylistically, written seemingly for a broader audience of professed religious and laity; by *Scale* 2, Hilton has expanded his notion of what contemplation is and how it may achieve its ends. Formalistically, in many respects the *Scale* is far removed from a lyric such as the “Long Charter.” The *Scale* is not primarily narrative, for one thing, though portions of it make significant use of narrative and its strategies. Yet there are some continuities as well, beyond the interest both works share in the Incarnation, and I find it particularly helpful in this instance to approach the *Scale* having thought about how form can work in lyric, a topic I shall take up again later in this chapter.

Seeking the “hid God”: The Silk of Scripture in *The Scale of Perfection*

In an essay on religious lyric, Christiania Whitehead groups lyrics roughly under three headings according to the predominant response they seek to elicit; as she puts it in recapitulating the structure of her essay, “We need to see. We need to identify with what we see. And, thirdly, we need to remember.”³⁰ A moment’s reflection reveals that the “Long Charter” encourages all three of these actions, even as steps taken in that order. Indeed, there is a symbiotic quality to “vision, identification, and memory” (116) that encourages a flow from one to another, a flow being explored increasingly today with the affective turn in medieval literary criticism. In some lyrics, such introspection is served by iteration of a refrain in shifting contexts, or by ever more particularized “fractur[ing],” as Whitehead calls it (103), of an image or metaphor. The “Long Charter” could be perceived this way, as an investigation of Christ’s humanity via an increasingly precise parceling-out of the charter metaphor. Yet, as I have been suggesting, an Incarnational poetic provides a more thoroughgoing, systemic foundation than that. By that I do not mean a uniform or didactic program; on the contrary, these works tend rather toward a working through of a mode of understanding, where the ways in which metaphors and imagistic elements of thought experiments interact and signify with respect to one another can illuminate shifts in a poet’s thought, or different attempts at groping toward one understanding. Moreover, an Incarnational poetic can usefully appeal to affect as well as to intellect. If we look only at a striking image in isolation—the Eucharist as indenture, the servant in Adam’s kirtle, Christ crucified on the lily tree—we risk missing the background that gives context to the salient feature. Hilton’s *Scale* offers an interesting example,

particularly in *Scale* 1, where, as is commonly noted, the imagery often indeed appears to be isolated rather than systemic. The *Scale*'s elaborate though understated constructedness situates Hilton as one of the more intriguing of late medieval English prose stylists, one moreover whose vernacular translations of scripture so define his argument that his techniques merit study for structural intricacy alone. His use of and engagement with scripture distinguish his voice from his contemporaries, and it is in his understanding of scripture's exemplary utility and evocative poetics that Hilton locates the Incarnation as central to his project.³¹

At the beginning of *Scale* 1, Hilton addresses his treatise to the anchoress, evidently newly come to the contemplative life, explaining that his purpose is to help her in her contemplation.³² His main focus is the anchoress's imperative to reshape the image of sin within her soul to its original form as the image of God; he uses the word "conversion" to signify the turning from either active life or lower contemplation to higher contemplation, the proper realm for someone of her vowed status. To illustrate his points, in both books he subtly adjusts scripturally based images, such as a coin, "lighti merkenesse," and the city of Jerusalem, to portray the unchanging but imperfectly seen God who must continually be sought. In the process, he manipulates language of revelation and hiddenness to approximate the process of contemplation itself, generating images, which he feels can only be similitudes of higher reality, that explain how the contemplative should seek to be remade—reformed—in the image of God—God's form— by means of God's incarnate Word. His English renderings of Latin scripture subtly contextualize and reshape the quoted texts, making translation less a matter of rendering the sense than of "coming across" from one place to another. His translations become a form of conversion, reforming the text as they seek to reform the self that internalizes that text. In *Scale* 2, Hilton ultimately arrives at the precise yet abstract vision of Jesus, the Word made flesh, hidden and wrapped in the soft silk of scripture.

Hilton begins with a practical imperative based on form—both true and feigned—and the reshaping of form:

For wite [*know*] thu weel, a bodili turnynge to God without the herte folwynge is but a figure or a likenes of vertues and no soothfastnesse [*reality*]. Wherefore a wrecchid man or a woman is he or sche that leueth [*neglects*] al the inward kepinge of hymself and schapith hym withoute oonli a fourme and likenes of hoolynesse, as in habite and in speche and in bodili werkes Do thou not so, but turne thyne herte with thy body principali to God, and schape thee withinne to his likenesse bi mekenesse and charité and othere goostli vertues, and thanne art thou truli turned to hym. (1.1.8–16)

From the very beginning of *Scale* 1, Hilton signals that the process of reforming will be bound up with the soul's ability to distinguish

between appearance and truth. He does so in terms that raise questions about language's capacity to convey meaning. As Nicholas Watson has pointed out, Hilton carefully avoids the word "image" here, a word whose semantic range in Middle English includes a concrete sense of a wrought object, such as an idol.³³ "Figure," "likenes," and "fourme" point to language's capacity to mean something other than it says directly, or to signal a higher reality. It is to this aspect of language that Hilton turns late in *Scale* 2 when he describes Christ's humanity as a shadow, an idea to which I shall return. The distinction Hilton initially draws between falsity and reality in this opening chapter becomes important later in *Scale* 1 for Hilton's Augustinian explanation of how men and women, made in the image of God, have become unlike God through sin. They retain within the mind in the faculty of "resoun" the true image, but not the likeness, of God, because the true image is obscured by foul blots of sin which must be chipped away, the subject of much of the remainder of *Scale* 1. Like Augustine in *De Trinitate*, Hilton begins by way of a concept that seems confined to his local purpose, but that later can be seen to resonate with his larger concerns.

In chapter nine of *Scale* 1, Hilton introduces the contrasting registers of darkness and illumination that recur throughout the *Scale* as a way to visualize both contemplation itself and the limits of human ability fully to comprehend God in this life.³⁴ In this passage, the partial sight available to the contemplative is both a light and a darkness, a case of the glass being simultaneously part empty and part full:

For this [contemplation] is verili a taastyng, and as it were a sight of heveneli joye, not cleerli, but half in derkenesse, which schal be fulfillid and opynli clerid in the blisse of hevene, as Seynt Poul seith: *Videmus nunc per speculum in enigmate; tunc autem videbimus facie ad faciem* (1 Cor. 13:12). We seen now God bi a myrour, as it were in deerkenesse, but in hevene we schulen see openli face to face. This [contemplation] is the illuminacion of undirstondyng in delites of lovyng, as David seith in the sautier: *Et nox mea illuminacio mea in deliciis meis* (Psalms 138:11). Mi nyght is my light in my delitees. (1.9.166–73)

Hilton begins with bodily experience (taste, sight) as he aims to describe a spiritual sensation. He shifts from the pleasurable yet ephemeral "tasting" of heavenly joy to an equally transitory half-dark (implying half-light) experience of sight. As *Scale* 1 continues, Hilton draws sometimes on imagery of light and sometimes of darkness. By offering both together here, he primes us to pair them, so that when one is salient, the other is closely available: "illumination" reminds us that a darkness exists, and "darkness" reminds us that full illumination has been promised, not in this life but in the next. Inherent to the combination of the two is progress over time: contemplation as a way toward the final goal of complete revelation in heaven. The delicious

paradox of “Mi nyght is my light” only resonates as potentially pleasurable insofar as the speaker is progressing toward total illumination.³⁵

This progression recurs throughout the *Scale* as the effort to reclaim a pre-Fall likeness to God, and is characterized most frequently as an ardent search for Jesus, hidden within the soul. In *Scale* 1, the prime exemplum is the parable of the woman who has lost a drachma (coin) in her house. In this case the scriptural texts are linked associatively by the image of a lantern. As Hilton translates Latin into English, he adjusts the sense to privilege the context he needs. This is a common exegetical technique, yet Hilton’s anchoress is either completely unable to read Latin or cannot read it well, as he suggests elsewhere.³⁶ Why, then, give the Latin at all? He does not seem to do so to assert clerkly *auctoritas*. Instead, Latin seems integral to his thought process, a sort of touchstone for vernacular expansion, much as it is for Langland, and perhaps for the “Long Charter” poet.³⁷ In the following passage, Hilton makes use of the common exegetical strategy of glossing scriptural passages for his local purpose, thereby linking discrete scriptural moments. Here Hilton’s focus comes to be scripture itself, even though the local topic of the passage is the illumination that may follow contemplation:

This dragme is Jhesu, whiche thou hast lost; yif thou wilt fynde hym, light up a lanterne, whiche is Goddis word, as David seith: *Lucerna pedibus meis verbum tuum* (Psalms 118:105). Lord, thi word to my feet is a lanterne. Bi this lanterne schalt thou see where he is, and hou thou schalt fynde hym; and yif thu wilt, thou mai with this light opyn anothir lanterne, that is the resoun of thi soule, for oure Lord seith: *Lucerna corporis tui est oculus tuus* (Matt. 6:22). The lanterne of thi bodi is thi bodili iye. Right so it mai be seid that the lanterne of thi soule is resoun, bi the whiche the soule mai see alle gosteli thinges. Bi this lanterne mai thou fynde Jhesu, and that is soth yif thou holde the lanterne up fro undirnethe the busschel, as oure Lord seith: *Nemo accendit lucernam et ponit eam sub modio, sed super candelabrum* (Matt. 5:15). There is no man that lighteth a lanterne for to sette it undir a busschel, but upon a candelstike; that is to seie, thi reson schal not be overlaid with worldli bisnesse, ne veyn thoughtes and fleisschli affeccionnes. . . . (1.48.1391–1403)

Illumination proceeds through time: God’s word illuminates darkness, revealing the hidden Jesus. Unlike “my night is my delight,” in this part of the exemplum, darkness is not profitable or desirable; the emphasis here is entirely on the soul’s capacity for enlightened progression. In the Psalms quotation, “Goddis word” does not signify Jesus, the word of God; in the exemplum, Jesus is the drachma. Instead, following Gregory’s *Moralia*, Hilton glosses the lantern as scripture, and this first lantern fires a second lantern, reason, which when brought out from under the bushel basket of worldly cares may be held high to make an effective search.³⁸ This chain of imagery would have worked without any Latin, of course, as a little exemplum of how to meditate. By retaining the Latin, however, Hilton emphasizes the importance of the word of God, scripture, because

either we read the quotations twice (if we know Latin), perhaps comparing the English translation to see where it diverges from the sense, or, if we cannot read Latin, we skip over it, taking these lines as rubrics that highlight the importance of the vernacular translation that follows. At the same time, Hilton himself models the very sort of contemplative meditation on scripture he advocates. In concluding his exegesis of the parable, Hilton explains the manner in which Jesus will be revealed to the ardent soul. Surprisingly, he treats shadow and glimmering as if they are interchangeable:

And yif thou fynde as I have seide, that is, yif thou may in cleernesse and clenness of conscience fele the hoomli and the peesful presence of Jhesu Crist mercifulli schewande hym to the face of thi soule as a schadewe or a glymerynge, thou mai, yif thou wolt, calle thi frendes to thee for to make mirthe with the, for thou hast founden thi dragme Jhesu. (1.48.1416–20)

A shadow is not normally a glimmering, nor vice versa, yet here they are classed together. Both resonate with images he has used before: “mercifulli schewande hym to the face of thi soule as a schadewe” recalls “We seen now God bi a myrour, as it were in deerkenesse, but in hevene we schulen see openli face to face” by the association of shadow with darkness and the face of the soul with the face to face encounter in heaven. The glymerynge both reinforces the image by negation of the light which is *not* hidden under the bushel basket, whose slats allow only the narrowest of rays to escape, and reiterates the promise of full illumination to come. Unlike the lantern, which in Hilton’s thought suggests a binary “lit” or “unlit” space, both shadow and glimmering are intense moments of partial lightness, partial darkness, but with the emphasis on dark versus light switched, and, as in chapter nine, both perspectives are offered. The moment of revelation is not a movement or progress but a point of stasis: *when* you see the shadow or glimmering, *then* you have found your drachma. While the lantern evokes movement through contemplation toward a goal, this moment of recognition signals a point of rest. Although Hilton does not make a point of it here, he is aware of the exegetical tradition of glossing Christ’s humanity as a shadow. Seeking Jesus within the soul, the anchoress may find a shadow of him, his humanity offering a glimpse of his divinity.³⁹

In *Scale 2*, Hilton once again takes up the question of how a contemplative might proceed, this time centering his imagery around a second parable, a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, where Jerusalem signifies contemplative union with God. Hilton’s handling of abstract concepts in *Scale 2* is deft and complex, and the Incarnational underpinnings of his work—present, but muted, in *Scale 1*—gradually become more salient.⁴⁰ By the middle of chapter twenty-four, Hilton has already established us on the road, following Jesus, who is a light

and a guide but at the same time unseeable and hidden. Here Hilton's English glosses are especially noticeable:

Biholde him wel, he goth bifore thee, not in bodili liknesse, but unseabli bi privei hid presence of his goostli myght; therfore see hym gostly yif thou myght . . . for hee schal leede thee in the righte weie to Jerusalem, that is, the sight of pees in contemplacioun. Thus praiede the prophete to the Fadir of hevene, seiynge thus: *Emitte lucem tuam et veritatem tuam ipsa me deduxerunt, et adduxerunt in montem sanctum tuum, et in tabernacula tua* (Psalms 42:3). That is: Fader of hevene, sende oute thi light and thi soothfastnesse, that is, thi sone Jhesu; and he schal lede me bi desire in me into thi hooli hille and into thi tabernaculis, that is, to the feelynge of perfighte love and heighte in contemplacioun. (2.24.1341–50)

Earlier, in “Mi nyght is my light in my delitees,” the darkness was a lack of understanding to be dispelled by illuminating contemplation through love. Here in chapter twenty-four the night is a profitable redirection of one's affection from worldly things to the light of the true day, Jesus. Progress through contemplation toward revelation is still the ultimate tenor of this word “nyght” but the local tenor has shifted slightly though the vehicle has remained the same:

. . . this is a good nyght and a lighti merkenesse, for it is a stoppynge ought of fals love of the world, and it is a neyhynge to the trewe dai. And sotheli the merkere that the nyght is, the nerrere is the trewe light of the love of Jhesu . . . Thus semede that the prophete menede whanne he seide thus: *Cum in tenebris sedeo, dominus mea lux est* (Micah 7:8). Whanne I sitte in myrkenesse oure Lorde is my light; that is, whanne my soule is hid from alle stirynges of synne as it were in sleep, thanne is oure Lord Jhesu my light, for thanne neigheh he of his grace for to schewe me of his light. (2.24.1393–1402)

As with “my night is my light,” here Hilton draws on a paradox, or perhaps a restatement of the same paradox on different ground: a “lighti merkenesse,” and “the merkere . . . the nyght, the nerrere . . . the trewe light.” It is a murkiness in which it is profitable to sit, at least for a while. As is commonly noted, however, Hilton's system of imagery is not entirely consistent with his strategies from *Scale 1*: while previously he indicated that we ought to move from night to light, here we find that further, deeper murkiness is desirable to enable progress, and the power of murkiness continues in the next chapter, where pilgrims on the road approach the city by night: “thanne neigheste thou faste to Jerusalem. Thou art not yit at it, but bi smale sodeyn lightnynges that gliteren oute thorough smale cranés fro the cité schalt thou mowen see it from feer, or thou come therto” (2.25.1491–93).

Small rays of distant light, evidence of a destination not yet reached, recall that earlier glimmer, “the hoomli and the peesful presence of Jhesu Crist mercifulli schewande hym to the face of thi soule as a schadewe or a glymerynge” in *Scale 1*. It is surely no accident that each of these two important parables holds out the tantalizing hope of the glimmer or glitter of a partially concealed

beacon, the fruit of the higher part of contemplation. According to Hilton, the glimmer results from beholding Jesus as God and man together, the Word veiled in flesh, elsewhere called “a hid God,” rather than in his suffering manhood only, the focal point of Passion devotion and the like. The glimmer is nearly a way to move beyond the veil of flesh: nearly, but not quite. The shadow, earlier linked only syntactically with the glimmering, comes back, in a passage I shall examine shortly, as a spiritual shadow with a body equivalent to the bodily veil of flesh. Hilton finally spells out that behind the conjunction of light and shadow I have been tracing lies the hypostatic union itself, the ultimate yoking of like and unlike that reforms humanity to the true image of God, an image that can only be glimpsed in this life, occasionally, through the work of contemplation.

Since Hilton frequently joins his thoughts by quoting and then interpolating, the figural links I have been pointing out tend to efface themselves as simply part of the fabric. Quite a lot else gets said between “mi nyght is my lyght” and “the merkere the nyght.” When his wording does recall an earlier passage, Hilton often does not retain a one-to-one correspondence in the local tenor of his metaphors, as in the case of “night.” When we read Hilton quickly, we may get the impression that by moving rapidly through quoted texts he drops each figure after its local purpose is served. However, Hilton’s general tactic seems to be to choose figures that revive earlier figures, setting old and new meanings side by side in recollection. As a result, while we may sometimes sense a disjuncture in his figurative language, the glimmer of the global tenor of Hilton’s metaphors continually draws us forward.

To turn briefly to the other issue I initially raised, that of Hilton’s understanding of form, re-forming, and language, Hilton begins with form as a reshaping of the image within, a conversion to contemplation. In the drachma exemplum, Jesus is hidden within the soul, to be sought by meditation and the chipping away of the image of sin. *Scale 2* contrasts this reforming in faith, as Hilton calls it, with the more difficult reforming in feeling, the work of higher contemplation. In lower contemplation, as Hilton describes it, a bodily understanding of spiritual concepts forces comprehension through the imagination, the image-processing portion of the mind. This Bernardine recognition of the bodiliness of sensory perception leads to his explanation of the hypostatic union as a shadow cast by light:

oure Lord Jhesu tempereth his unseable light of his godhede, and clothid it undir bodili liknesse of his manhede, and scheweth it to the innere iye of the soule. . . . And this is the schadwyng of oure Lord Jhesu overe a chosen soule. . . . right as a schadwe is maad of a light and a bodi, right so this goostli schadwe is maad of the blissid unseable light of the godhede, and of the manhede ooned therto, and is schewed to a devoute soule.
(2.30.2022–30)

The hypostatic union thus has a visible body, the shadow, or Christ's manhood, and an unseeable light, Christ's godhood, which casts the visible shadow by means of (unseeable) illumination.⁴¹ In his use of glimmer earlier and shadow here, Hilton associatively links the soul's desire to see Jesus to his earlier parable of the drachma, via the glinting and glimmering of a coin in the dark. "Shadow" also subtly links back to the very opening of *Scale* 1, where scripture study informed by reason only is "but a figure and a schadewe of verry contemplacioun" (1.4.64), a pale imitation.⁴²

In the following passage, the tenor of hiddenness has shifted, much as I noted with night, earlier. Here "within" and hiddenness take on erotic qualities: the worldly prostitution of the soul that is "withoute" at the beginning of the example makes the contrasting (and scriptural) "priveté" stand out as all the more exclusive and desirable:⁴³

Al withoute is a soule while it is overlaid and blynded with wordli love; it is as comone as the highwai. For eche a stiringe that cometh of the flesch or of the feende synketh in, and gooth thorough it. But thanne thorough grace is it withdrawn into privei chambre . . . Of this speketh the prophete thus: *Secretum meum michi; secretum meum michi* (Isa. 24:16). Mi priveté to me, my pryvyté to me. That is, the love of Jhesu, thorough inspiracion of his grace taken up from outeward feelynge of wordli love and ravyssched into priveté of goostli love, yeeldeth thankynge and seiyinge to hym thus: Mi pryveté to me. That is, my Lord Jhesu in priveté is schewed to me and pryveli hid fro all the lovers of the world, for it is called hid manna . . . And that oure Lord Jhesu bihotith to his love this: *Dabo sibi manna absconditum, quod nemo novit, nisi qui accipit* (Rev. 2:17). That is, I schal geven manna hid that no man knowith but he that taketh it. (2.40.2957–69)

Hiddenness begins to mean exclusivity, the mutual bond between lovers, private and uncommon. Reforming in understanding thus necessitates perception on a conceptual rather than a sensory level. The priveté of hid manna may be found only in the absence of sensory perception, despite the bodiliness of both the eroticism and the eating metaphor.⁴⁴ So it is reforming in understanding that illuminates the hid God, and here at last the incarnate Word is revealed as hidden within scripture:

grace . . . stireth the soule for to seen and feelen Jhesu in othir maner. And that manere is first for to see Jhesu in Hooli Writte; for Jhesu, that is al sothfastnesse, is hid and helid [*clothed, wrapped, sheltered*] therinne, woun den in a soft sendeel [*silk*] undir faire wordis . . . and bi a litil heldyng [*pouring*] of his wisdom into a clene soule he maketh the soule wise ynowgh for to undirstonde alle Hooli Writte—not alle at ones in special biholdyng, but thorough that grace the soule receyveth a newe ablenesse, and a gracious abite [*disposition*] for to undirstonde it speciali whanne it cometh to mynde. (2.43.3278–97)

Divine truth must be grasped in full, not reasoned or seen. Hilton describes an experience that is not so much visionary—not all at once in special beholding—as it is revelatory—a new ableness to understand when scripture comes to mind. *When* you see the shadow or the glimmering, *then* you have found your drachma. Moreover,

Jesus is not only hidden in scripture, he is swaddled in it—clothed, wrapped, sheltered, embraced. As earlier the half-dark suggested half-light, in his tactile emphasis on the soft, smooth, precious enwrapment of silk, Hilton subtly invites the thought of unwrapping—a process in time. Revelation, as he describes it, does not come all in a rush, fleetingly. The comfort of being wrapped in silk is as intimate as the comfort of a habit, a disposition, a long-held custom, a way one comes to by repeated use over time. In more than one sense, scripture is essential to Hilton’s concept of reforming in understanding, as it is not for Julian or the *Cloud-author*, or even for Augustine.

I began my discussion of Hilton with form, likeness, and the conversion to contemplative life; I am closing it with hiddenness that necessitates inspirational understanding. Unlike some of his contemporaries, Hilton recommends meditation *both* on the words of scripture *and* on the writings of the Church fathers. Although humility would surely preclude him from putting his *Scale* on the same footing, Hilton’s use of figures suggests that he may leave interrelationships only half-explained deliberately, despite the overall didactic tone and purpose of the *Scale*, so that the process of reading and thinking about imagery in the *Scale* resembles contemplative progress itself, a gradual movement from unlikeness to likeness, from unknowing to comprehension insofar as comprehension is possible in this life.

Such an emphasis on the process of working is perhaps more naturally a part of a manual for contemplatives than we might expect it to be for lyric. Yet a similar focus on work often seems natural for lyric poems, which offer a way into a mode of thought or working. Such poems require a certain engagement from their readers not unlike the active work of contemplation Hilton outlines. I next wish to consider three lyrics with botanical subject matter, poems that draw on the topos of the leaps of Christ and also the Truelove tradition. As with the “Long Charter,” these are relatively brief. Structure, and in two cases refrain, is key to their effect.

Vitality, Church, Salvation: Springing and Sprouting in Some Botanical Lyrics

Thomas Hill has remarked on how closely the events in “Mary, the Rose-Bush,” a fifteenth-century carol previously thought to describe the Five Joys of Mary, parallel the leaps of Christ.⁴⁵ Here the leaping action is entirely transformed into botanical springing of the rosebush’s branches. The structure is fairly straightforward, the springings offered seriatim, like the homilists’ listings, and the series is

designated quite clearly as a pattern (the first . . . the second . . .). The poet treats the leaps as not only botanical but also vertical and spatial, much as Ambrose did in “*Veni redemptor gentium.*”⁴⁶ As the poem progresses, the poet stresses the spatial element more and more strongly (“spryng and spred,” 19; “sprong to hell,” 23; “sprong to hevyn,” 28):

Of a rose, a louely rose,
Of a rose I syng a song.

Lyth and lystyn, both old and yyng,
How the rose begane to spryng;
A fayyrer rose to owr lekyn
Sprong ther neuer in kynges lond.

attend; listen; young

liking

v branchis of that rose ther ben,
The wyche ben both feyer and chene;
Of a maydyn, Mary, hevyn quene,
Ovght of hyr bosum the branch sprong.

*five
which; fair; beautiful*

out

The [first] branch was of gret honour:
That blyssed Mary shuld ber the flour,
Ther cam an angel ovght hevyn toure
To breke the develes bond.

outfrom

The second branch was gret of myght,
That sprong vpon Cristmes nyght;
The sterre shone and lemeghd bryght
That man schuld se it both day and nyght.

The third branch gan spryng and spred;
iii kynges than to branch gan led
Tho to Owre Lady in hure chyldbéd;
Into Bethlem that branch sprong ryght.

The fourth branch, it sprong to hell,
The deueles powr for to fell,
That no sovre therin shuld dwell,
The brannch so blessedfully sprong.

The fifth branch, it was so swote,
Yt sprong to hevyn, both crope and rote,
In euery ball to ben owre bott
So blessedly yt sprong.¹¹

*gracious
the entire plant
woe; salvation*

In this case, four of the five springings can be explained by reference to the leaps: the Annunciation, Nativity, Visit of the Magi, Harrowing of Hell, and Ascension. The odd one out of this list, compared to common enumerations of the leaps, is the coming of the magi (stanza five).⁴⁸ We have already seen the magi linked to the leaps, though there the visit is not itself a leap: Imaginatif’s description of love’s leap, in *Piers Plowman*. There the association with clerkly learning transforms the biblical shepherds and magi into the clerks and parish

priests of late medieval England, responsible for propagation of the faith by educating the laity. A similar idea might be implied by the phrase “spryng and spred” here in “Rose-Bush,” where spreading, in conjunction with magi, would seem to imply propagation of the faith by means of learned men, or perhaps even the prefiguration of the birth of the Church on earth.

“Rose-Bush” is relatively brief, its simplicity emphasizing the serial quality of the leaps with their organic flow one to another. In the late fourteenth-century lyric “The Four Leaves of the Truelove,” the language of leaping is similarly transformed to botanical springing, but the narrative makes even greater use of the capacity of the leaps topos to stress the vast distance between heaven and hell. Here the true-love plant exemplifies the unity of love among the three Persons of the Trinity and Mary, each of whom is repeatedly figured as one of the four leaves. Even more than in “Rose-Bush,” the power of the verse results from the apt congruity between rising and falling, between the fresh vitality of growth and the dying dropping-off of withered foliage. Because the poet adeptly maintains an alignment between his metaphor and his message, the religious meaning does not overwhelm the natural image or move us completely into the realm of the abstract: the flower insistently and persistently reveals itself through the arc traced out by Jesus’ growing, then lifeless, then revitalized, then transformed body.

In an eco-critical reading of William Dunbar’s lyric “Swete rois of vertew and of gentilnes,” the Trinity College carol, “Ther is no rose of swych virtue,” and the Harley lyric, “Nou skrinkeþ rose ant lylie-flour,” Gillian Rudd has made a plea for keeping in mind the material flowers that lie behind figurative language or allegories. In doing so, she calls attention to the slipperiness of signification in botanical lyrics, an issue I raised for a somewhat different purpose in Chapter 2:

Much of what follows shows that words and images slide across the boundary between real and symbolic, so much so that we might question how much there is indeed a boundary; perhaps we would do better to think of the terms as part of a continuum. Better still we could shed the image of a straight line that “continuum” implies and instead try to think in terms of moving fluidity among a wealth of signification, association, and description.⁴⁹

Given that psycholinguistic studies increasingly suggest that language is not processed in “literal first” terms, the technical distinction between “sense selection” and “sense creation,” which I noted earlier, is also relevant here. The cognitive processing required when we consider a novel metaphor, such as “God is a leaf,” may exist somewhere between “sense selection” and “sense creation.”⁵⁰ Moreover, increasing numbers of studies are favoring the “underspecification” model of cognition, in which the language

processor, rather than choosing a particular literal or metaphorical signification for an ambiguous lexeme, defaults to a reading that fails to resolve that ambiguity. This probability suggests that the tendency of medieval religious lyrics to leave ambiguous metaphors unresolved works particularly well precisely because of how we process language.⁵¹ One approach to underspecification takes what psycholinguists have termed a “‘good-enough’ approach to language,” wherein “people often prefer to leave ambiguities unresolved when resources are in short supply or when motivation to undertake all the necessary processing steps is low,” leading to “shallow” comprehension.⁵² But “shallow” would not be the only possibility here, would it? Such a default processing mechanism would also help to explain why supereffability can be so effective: underspecification would allow for what I want to call a *much more than good-enough* approach. I argued in Chapter 1 that underspecification could be the cognitive mechanism that enables Capgrave’s “full word.” If Rapp and Gerrig are correct when they postulate that processing of metaphor works the same way across distinct types of syntactical units (“lexical items” and “contextual expressions”),⁵³ it would also seem likely that under-specification enables supereffability equally in metaphor and in a poetic, in both Capgrave’s “full word” and the larger structures traced out by Augustine’s “revolving motion” or the “eddyding back of sense.”

Keeping such findings in mind, Rudd’s rejection of “a continuum” in favor of “moving fluidity” works particularly well, in the case of “Truelove,” wherever the actions of the leaves of the true-love are the focus of attention, as for example in this stanza, which describes the Incarnation:

Now is this ilk second ~~schief, leaf, our love~~ above all
 maste,
 Lyght in that Lady that Gabriell grette;
 Withowt any treson, so trew for to traste,
 With myrth in a mayden is God and man mette.
 Thys is the Fader and the Son and the Holy Gaste—
 Thre lefes of lufe withowtyn any lette;
 The fourte is a mayden chosen for chaste.
 Swylke another trewluf was never in land sett
 For bute.
 Thare foure lefes may never fall,
 Bot evermare thai springe sall,
 So gently thai joyn all
 On a ryche rute.⁵⁴ (131–43)

*alighted; greeted
 treason; believe in*

*love; hindrance
 purity
 such
 remedy
 those
 shall*

splendid/strong/noble/powerful; root

The motion entailed in following the descent of the Second Person continues inward and downward as the poet describes the juncture of leaves in their liveliness, just the sort of small changeability characteristic of the growth and unfolding of flowers that is

nevertheless a constant quality (“evermare thai springe sall”), before the poet’s thought reaches the strong support of the root, with its evocative resonance of the Jesse Tree.⁵⁵ Punningly and suitably, the “root” is a stem, but also a homophonous “rout,” a company, a body, a group of associates.⁵⁶ Moreover, plants are, by their very nature, ever-changing, yet that process of seasonal growth is entirely predictable. Here the “trewluf” is the more remarkable for being perpetual in its vitality: “Thare foure lefes may never fall” but instead will forever provide medicinal aid, the “bute” of line 139.

The poem begins with a *chanson d’aventure* opening, wherein an unspecified “I” walking through the forest in May comes upon an unhappy maiden, who is calling on Mary for aid. A turtledove overhears her and asks why she is lamenting. The maiden replies that she has been looking everywhere for a “trewluf” without success; she asks the bird for help in learning how to find love that will not fly away. The remainder of the poem consists of the bird’s explanation of what true love is and how to find it. He declares that four leaves, when set together in a true-love plant, exemplify true love, unchangeable and eternal:

Hardely dare I say
Thare is no luf that lastes ay
Withowtyn treson and tray
Bot it begyn thare. (62–65)

deceit
unless

The maiden is, of course, eager to learn about true love but has nothing more to say and virtually drops out of the narrative, which becomes a compressed version of salvation history from the Creation to the end of time, told primarily by means of events from Christ’s life. At the very end of the poem, the “I” briefly reemerges to complete the *chanson d’aventure* framework and bring the poem back around to its beginning.

Both Susanna Fein and Helen Phillips have written compellingly about the poem’s intriguing form, with Phillips noting the possible influence of the leaps of Christ: “The poem’s structure forms a Truelove knot: the knot has four equal bows and no visible ends; the poem begins and ends with the same words and has forty stanzas which form four equal sections. . . . This quadripartite design probably reflects the tradition of the leaps of Christ.”⁵⁷ The sections to which she refers are defined both by events in Christ’s life and by language of springing or falling. The three pivotal events distinguishing the poem’s four sections are the Incarnation, the Harrowing, and the Last Judgment.⁵⁸ As Fein has shown, the four-part design of the poem was incorporated into its original page layout; although this original does not survive, the layout can be traced from evidence in the extant

copies, particularly the Thornton manuscript.⁵⁹

At its finest, the poem glides effortlessly throughout the area I wish not to call a boundary or continuum, its movement easily encompassing the material world, materially imagined; the immaterial, equally materially imagined; and a no-man's-land in between. The poet's strategy of persistently referring to each person of the Trinity and Mary as a numbered leaf recalls the unity and strength of the "ryche rute" of line 143. It does so in a way that "First Person," "Second Person," "Third Person," "Mary" could not do, nor yet could "Father," "Son," "Holy Spirit," "Mother." The sequence "First Leaf," "Second Leaf," "Third Leaf," "Fourth Leaf" places Mary well within the action without claiming for her any sort of divinity.⁶⁰ Moreover, the crucial stanza that tells the Incarnation (quoted above) becomes a vital reference point for the whole of the poem, for all actions within the poem. However much the poem is a work of affect, and of intellect, it is nevertheless didactic as well, as the *chanson d'aventure* framework indicates, so there is a lesson to be learned here, and that is the answer to the maiden's quest: what is true love, where can I find it, and can I trust it to be all I hope it will be? The four leaves joined together in a vital enterprise remain central to answering that question, no matter where in the poem we look. In the stanza on the Resurrection, for example, the poet again links all four leaves within one poetic unit, where action and movement predominate:

The fourte lef of that lufe falow⁶¹ is for ~~prale~~ woe
When scho was lefed⁶² moder, mayden, and wyf
The fyrst lef full wyghte,⁶³ His will was swa
Be assent of the third lef, was thar no stryfe
Raysed Thai the second lef between Tham twa
Thurght grace of the godhed, fro ded unto lyf.
He toke a crose in His hand and furth gon He ga
With His flech and His fell and His wondes fyfe

He yode.

When He was resyn agayn,
He mett Mary Mawdelayn;
No ferly yf scho war fayn!

He was hir lech gode. (274–86)

she; left
very powerful/healthy/vigorous; so [strong]
by
two
go
flesh; skin; five wounds
went
no wonder she was delighted
good physician

The materiality of this description is so well realized, from the revitalization of the second leaf to the specificity of Jesus' body, flesh and skin and wounds and all, walking along. That image is all the more effective for the metaphor that preceded it, the first and third leaves raising the second. Its concrete materiality is underlined by the characterization of Christ as physician, since what do physicians do but examine, and treat, fleshly bodies? Another poem at this point might describe Jesus as a gardener, since John 20:15 tells us Mary Magdalen mistook him for one. Here, however, he is a physician,

again recalling the medicinal properties of herbal remedies (“bute,” 139), and of the true-love in particular.

The Vernon refrain lyric “Flourdelys” similarly draws on the broader Truelove tradition, Marian traditions, and the leaps to define its poetic deep structure. The botanical imagery of “Flourdelys” is more extensive and its treatment more complex than that of “Rose-Bush,” yet more tightly compressed in the sense of each line than is “Truelove.” The refrain reports diverse actions of the “Flourdelys” (lily flower), where springing and spreading are two actions among others. Although, like “Rose-Bush,” the poem may, at first glance, appear to be structured by the Marian scheme that makes up its outer frame, its core comprises a compressed narrative of the life of Christ, focusing on life events that coincide with leaps. After an initial invocation of aid, addressed to Mary, the speaker explores a “lesson” (7) to be taught by means of the Flourdelys. The lily flower figures prominently in each refrain, yet its larger significance emerges gradually and deepens as the poem progresses. “Flourdelys” becomes a sort of shorthand for the incarnate Christ on earth and later, more ambiguously, perhaps for salvation itself, or Christ’s enabling of salvation. Throughout, the poem draws on the language of springing and sprouting characteristic of botanical versions of the leaps of Christ. After comparing Mary and Christ to this most prized flower, the speaker shifts to acknowledge the power (“vertu,” 24) of the Flourdelys, which enables the freeing of sinful humanity. The Flourdelys begins with Mary’s answer to Gabriel’s greeting (32), will “springe” from Mary (40), was “sprongen” when her child died for Adam’s sins (48, 41, 47), “was sprad” when that child left the tomb (56), is taught to Adam and Eve during the harrowing of hell (64), is shown to Mary Magdalene when “þis heende [*courteous one*]” goes “As God and Mon to-gedere” “Bodily bope in blod and bon” (65, 70, 71), and may be seen by those dwelling in heaven, since the “bairde [*scion, lord, child, shoot*]” has climbed into the clouds (82, 86). The scheme of leaps underlying deep structure here, then, includes Incarnation, Nativity, Crucifixion, Deposition, Harrowing, Resurrection and Appearance, and Ascension. The poem concludes with Mary’s assumption and crowning in heaven and a brief prayer to Mary and her son for grace and heavenly bliss, that we may dwell in heaven “wiþ þi Flourdelys” (136). Like other botanical lyrics that play on the twinned meaning of “spring” as botanical growth and leap, “Flourdelys” offers Christ’s life as a miniature version of salvation history. The poet relies on our knowing something about Christological associations with the lily and invites us to meditate on the Incarnation as a moment in time as well as an emanative movement that transcends time yet is not in any way bound by time.

In the case of the “Long Charter,” I posed the question of how we might recognize an Incarnational poetic when the Crucifixion is fundamental to that poem’s imagery. Here with “Flourdelys,” the poem’s opening and closing apostrophes to Mary suggest that we might want to class the poem among Marian lyrics. My brief outline showed the leaps pattern, but to see how thoroughgoing the poem’s engagement with the Incarnation is, once again we must read more closely. Earlier I noted that, like many lyrics and carols, this poem at times fails to differentiate between Mary and Jesus as distinct persons, particularly in moments where the botanical imagery is most strongly engaged.⁶⁴ That sort of elision—an imperceptible gliding over from one site of reference to another—is strongly in play here in the refrain’s iterations of the Flourdelys. A refrain naturally sets up the expectation that a certain form is being followed—we expect repetition—yet at its best, a refrain also thwarts our expectations when it offers an apt surprise. It both meets and exceeds our expectations of form. No wonder, perhaps, that both generation and craftsmanship are of special interest to this poet. He begins by linking Mary’s excellence, the lesson his poem will teach, and the poetic craft that makes merit known:

Marie Mayden · Moder Mylde

 þat blisful Bern · in bosum beere

Cheef & chast · þou ches of chylde

 Of alle wymmen · In world þat were

Saue vs sound · and socur vs here

 As princes is preised · & proued for prys

What leode þis lesson · lykes to lere

Be token hit is · þe Flourdelys

child

you who were chosen from childhood

help

princess; [her] worth proven

whatever person; learn

it is symbolized by

þat freoli flour · weore fair to fynde

What gome wolde go · þer-as hit greu3

As Maacer⁶⁵ herof · made in his Mynde⁶⁶

þus kenned him Catoun · his craftes he kneu3

What segge on soil · þat þat seed seu3

 Hit is holy · at myn a-vys

Aboue þe Braunches · bep Blossmes neu

 þe lele cheses fair · þe Flourdelys

beautiful flower; would be splendid

for whomever; to where it grew

crafted in his thought about it

Cato taught him; knew

Whoever the person; sowed

it; in my opinion

faithful one courteously chooses

In this encomiastic apostrophe to Mary, the poet acknowledges her singular merit, which he demonstrates first by reference to her having borne Jesus, and second by her having been set apart even as a child. From the very first, then, his focus is on merit and generation. The rest of the poem will be a “lesson” symbolized by the fleur-de-lys. The focus on teaching explains what otherwise might seem a digression in the next stanza, the poet’s assertion that Macer “made in his Mynde” about the flower, as Cato taught him, with the emphatic reiteration of generative, poetic “craftes” that can be taught and practiced. Both

topics—teaching and poetic craft—return later in the poem, the latter explicitly connected with God’s creation of the world (116, 119–20), the former with Christ’s bringing Adam and Eve out from hell (64). Macer’s thought in this context calls to mind God’s generous and generative thought, suggesting that the “segge” who sowed the “holy” seed “on soil” (13, 14) might be God, in which case we have moved well beyond talking about a flower in a field, or solely about such a flower. The stanza is notably the more rich on a second reading of the poem, once we know the Flourdelys of the refrain is poised to signify Christ, then Christ as a means to salvation, then salvation, shifting its significance as the poem progresses. The difficult final line to this stanza offers what looks like a pun: both meter and sense urge us to read “lele” as “faithful” or “loyal,” probably referring back to the “gome” who seeks the lily on line 10. “Lele” can also mean “lily,” however, as it punningly seems to in the next line, where Mary is the “lele ladi” and the poem’s center of interest shifts to a striking image of enwrapment in a context that evokes Julian’s use of what Amy Appleford has termed “late medieval death culture.”⁶⁷ “Lele” thus bridges two stanzas, much as “graiþly” (23)/“greiþli” (25) does across stanzas two and three. This is not full-fledged concatenation of the *Pearl* type, and the poet does not sustain the pattern, but it does serve to increase the sense that *form* matters here, and that one thought leads naturally to another related one; such connections are portrayed as organic. They are connections, not just similitudes, and they suggest that the developing richness of the lily’s symbolism is not simply symbolic:

Dou lele ladi · I likne to þe *faithful/lily; compare*
 Þe flour · to þi semeli sone also
 Þe blisful Blossme · þat euer mihte be
 Treuly jat was · be-twix 3ou to
 Whon we weore wrapped · al in wo
 Þorw werkes · þat we had wrou3t wrongwys
 Ði godnes gert vs · graiþly go
 Þorw vertu · of þi Flourdelys

beautiful
most praiseworthy
two

sinfully
caused; suitably
[medicinal] power

The confining enwrapment of “we” who are enveloped by sin, a concept the more woefully expressed for the alliteration on “w” over two lines, is immediately loosened and enables free movement because of Mary’s worth and through the power of the Fleur-de-lys. In “vertu” the poet offers a sidelong reference to the medicinal power of herbs, but also to Christ’s power—both his virulence and his humanity (the “vir” in “vertu” is Latin for “man”)—much as we saw earlier with the Truelove. Here, moreover, the poet puns on the similarity of “gert” (“caused,” from *geren*) and “gert” (“clothed, encircled,” from *girden*): Mary’s noble act of accepting God protectively within her womb unwraps us from woe and suitably clothes us, freeing us to move about properly. Just as with Julian, enwrapment suggests both winding sheet and swaddling clothes, with a focus here on the proper development of children, who grow to freedom of mobility under their mother’s care.

With stanza four and the Annunciation begins a shift in address (“So sittyngli hire sawes heo set,” 29) away from the apostrophe to Mary into more direct narrative, and the scheme of the leaps begins. From this point, the poet links backward to themes we have already seen and forward to new ones, leaving us to continue working out the significance of *Flourdelys* anew with each repetition of the refrain. Stanza five introduces the keyword “springe,” which clinches the pattern as the leaps of Christ. It is especially interesting to compare the Annunciation here with the version in *Piers Plowman* I discussed in Chapter 4. Gabriel’s words are not given at all, and Mary’s response is addressed not to him but to God. She signals in one word, “soget,” both her recognition of God’s kingship and the intimate nature of what she is asked to do; a “subject” is a servant but may also be a lover:⁶⁸

Ful greiþi was þe graunted grace	<i>readily</i>	
Whon Gabriel · from god þe gret		<i>greeted</i>
þat fel to þi feet · bi-fore þi face		
þe Murieste meetyng · þat euer was met.		
So sittyngli hire sawes heo set		<i>fittingly/suitably; consent</i>
As a wommon · boþe war and wys		<i>prudent</i>
“To-seo þi seruant · and þi soget”		<i>behold; subject</i>
And þer bi-gon furst · þi Flourdelys		
In hond þou haddest · & heold vr hele	<i>hand; held our well-being/salvation</i>	
torw him þat hadde · hei3 heuene in holde	<i>in possession/under control</i>	
What Murþe was mad · no Mouþ mi3t mele	<i>mouth might say</i>	
Whon þou þat worþly · hed wonnen in wolde	<i>noble one; received in possession</i>	
He com to keuere vs · of cares colde	<i>deliver/cure/recover; from</i>	
His pepul he put · in paradys		
þat tyde and tyme · þe Angel tolde		
Of þe schulde springe · þe Flourdelys		

The diction here reflects lordship and land tenure. Mary’s willing subjugation immediately reverses her state: in stanza five she is no longer portrayed as “soget” (31), but she rules, demonstrating both the merit and royal qualities claimed for her in the first stanza (“As princes is preised & proued for prys,” 6). Her royal possession is “vr hele” (33), but it is unclear whether this is an elliptical way of referring simply to her pregnancy (Jesus = our salvation, which she held in physical possession in her womb) or reflects more specifically on her qualities that enable her to assent to that pregnancy. Both readings work, and neither excludes the other. The Incarnation is itself described in terms of lordship and land tenure, making a suitable alignment between humanity’s condition (33) and Jesus’ (36), as well as between Mary’s regality and Christ’s (34).⁶⁹ Line 37 (“He com to keuere vs of cares colde”) masterfully recalls lines 21 and 23 (“Whon we weore wrapped al in wo”; “þi godnes gert vs graiþly go”) and

reverses the imagery of line 21 while reinforcing the imagery of line 23: “he came to deliver us from the lifeless pain of death,” but also “to cure us” (which further recalls “In hond þou haddest & heold vr hele” just above it), and also “to recover us.” Punningly, that last can be taken as “re-cover us,” “cover us again,” or “re-wrap us,” blanketing us with life-giving warmth such as a mother gives; this sense is made salient by “of cares colde.”⁷⁰ Here it is worth noting once more how much of the poem to this point has been concerned with infancy, childhood, generation, and fostering—all pointing toward or to be considered in relation to this moment of Christ’s Incarnation. In the refrain to this stanza comes the strongest hint so far that the Flourdelys might be Christ (“Of þe schulde springe þe Flourdelys,” 40), yet it might be salvation (“In hond þou haddest & heold vr hele,” 33).⁷¹

The promise of these two stanzas is that the Flourdelys *will* spring. In the next stanza, it does. The poet shows real initiative in not confining the events corresponding to the leaps to a single stanza each; he is not afraid to work across stanzas, giving his verse an elasticity of form that is powerful in its confidence. The simplicity of “the first branch sprang . . . the second branch sprang” works well for a short lyric such as “Rose-Bush”; for this more complex effort, freely working across stanzas offers imaginative possibilities the poet embraces to great effect. With the Crucifixion in stanza six, the Flourdelys springs up; with Christ’s exit from the tomb in stanza seven, it spreads:

Pat Blisful Barn · of þe was born	<i>child</i>
Pat suffred trauayle · boþe trey and tene	<i>affliction</i>
Throly þrusten & throng wiþ þorn	<i>violently stabbed and pierced</i>
Of his cunreden · vnkuynde and kene	<i>by; kindred; unnatural</i>
From top to-torn · al bi-deene	<i>straight away</i>
þe Iewes þei lugged · his Iuwys	<i>sentence</i>
And dy3ed for Adam deedes · bi-deene	<i>indeed</i>
And þerine was sprongen þe Flourdelys	
A studi steer · þer stod ful steere	<i>steady star; securely</i>
For steeres-men · þat bi stremes gun stray	<i>helmsmen</i>
And neore his worþly will weore	<i>if it were not that his excellent will were wise</i>
þei wolde haue went · a wilful way	
No feyntysenes · þei founden in fay	<i>faintheartedness?/deceit?; truth/faith</i>
þat burth was buried · In Marbel bys	<i>child; dark gray</i>
And whon god wolde · he went his way ⁷²	<i>desired</i>
And þenne was sprad · þe Flourdelys	

Stanza seven’s imagery is particularly intriguing. Is Christ on the Cross a star that lights helmsmen home, or a rudder securely staying the course?⁷³ His “worþly wille” (51) is contrasted with their “wilful way” (52).⁷⁴ “[I]n fay” has a double sense: as a stock phrase for emphasis in

telling a story (“in truth” or “certainly”), and to reinforce the governing image of following a perseverant course, seeking the truth to be found in steadfastly cleaving to [Christian] faith by coming to God through Christ.⁷⁵ Even here, Jesus is described as a child (41, 54), reinforcing the continuity of events flowing from the Incarnation. As Jesus goes his way when God desires it (55), the poet reiterates the imagery of the appropriate path and justly governed will, and the Flourdelys spreads, perhaps even overflowing the confines of stanzaic form here, as it is difficult to construe the syntax for line 57 unless the line modifies “was sprad” from line 56.⁷⁶ Like the “Long Charter” and *Piers Plowman*, “Flourdelys” associates the freeing of Adam, Eve, and the others with the health and growth of the Church, using imagery of lordship. Whereas in “Rose-Bush” the plant spreads with the visit of the magi, in “Flourdelys,” the plant spreads when Christ leaves the tomb and harrows hell. With that spreading comes Christ’s post-Resurrection ministry on earth, portrayed here as a ministry of teaching and empowerment:

Where his worþli wilnyng was *noble desire*
 Hit weore to wite⁷⁷ · whoder he went
 þe geynest gate · griþli he
 Til derknes · dipt doun · he decent
 þe 3ates he russchede · and al to Rent
 þer Lucifer · þat lupure lys
 Adam and Eue · bi hond he hent
 And tau3te hem faire · þe Flourdelys

*it would be worth knowing
 tas quickest path readily he takes
 into the pit of darkness; descended
 gates; battered down; tore to pieces
 where; wicked one
 took
 graciously taught them*

þus haþ þis heende · herewed helle
 Al Adames of-spring · out haþ tan
 þe fend þat was · boþe fers and felle
 He ti3ed til a stok · stille as stan
 Vp of his graue · þen is he gon
 As God and Mon · to-gedere gon Rys
 Bodily boþe in blod and bon
 To þe Maudeleyn · he schewed þe Flourdelys
 þus purchased he þe pepul heor pees
 And goodly for 3af hem · al heore gilt
 And seide Adam · eft nou I þe sese
 In blisse · þat for blod was buld
 No wey wonde · but wurch what þou wilt
 þus haþ he now · bitau3t þat wyse
 And þus feole prophecies · ben folfid
 Of Marie · wiþ þi Flourdelyse

*courteous one
 taken
 Mary Magdalen
 forgave
 now I enfeoff you again
 because of kinship⁷⁸; fashioned/restored
 do not hesitate; do
 granted to that reasoning man⁷⁹
 many*

What does it mean that Adam and Eve are taught “þe Flourdelys”? Are they taught the life of Christ as explained in this poem by means of the metaphor, fleur-de-lys? Are they taught to recognize the Christ, previously unknown to them, here referred to by the metaphor, fleur-de-lys? Are they taught about their salvation? Is it their physical removal from hell that is the “lesson”? It is difficult to say, and that

ambiguity effectively keeps all these possibilities in play, through the underspecification of sense. In any event, Adam and Eve are touched physically by Christ, a point the poet makes deliberately (“Adam and Eue bi hond he hent,” 63), in subtle contradistinction to the *noli me tangere* when Christ makes himself known to Mary Magdalen (72).⁸⁰ The material physicality of his touch evokes his own liberating mobility—flesh, skin, bones and all—in line 71.⁸¹ The same rich ambiguity of signification operates in line 72, where the scriptural narrative tips “Flourdelys” toward “Christ,” but the local context would allow a reading in which what Christ reveals is not just his identity but the further lesson of salvation as well as how he is the means to salvation. When the poet adds the specific detail of the devil tied to a tree, “stille as stan” (68), the image emphasizes Jesus’ busy activity (“Vp of his graue þen is he gon,” 69) and the devil’s real impotence here serves as a foil to Jesus’ earlier steadfast and efficacious cleaving to the Cross as star or rudder (49). As with Imaginatif’s retelling of the Incarnation in *Piers Plowman*, and as with the springing of the third branch in “Rose-Bush,” associated with the magi, here again springing and spreading are linked with learning, this time at the harrowing, and the instructor is no less an authority than Christ himself. This liberation of Adam, Eve, and the prophets institutes the beginning of the Church in heaven, the communion of saints, just as the Church spreads on earth with the sending forth of the apostles at Pentecost.

With stanza ten the poet begins to bring Mary back into the poem as he prepares to complete the leaps scheme. This stanza draws together several lines of thought suggested by earlier imagery. By this time the dialogue between Christ and Adam is more generally a dialogue between Christ and humanity, to whom Christ bequeaths heavenly bliss in language reminiscent of the Charters of Christ (“Adam eft nou I þe sese / In blisse,” 75–76). Here, though, the repetition of the sound “tau3te” within the word “bitau3t” forges an association between learning about the Fleur-de-lys/Christ/salvation and the promise of salvation itself, the granting of heavenly bliss. In this instance, the clergy are not specifically invoked as an agent for spreading the faith; however, the wider associations of “þenne was sprad,” in conjunction with Christ’s teaching of the faith, appear to settle this portion of the poem within the context of Church we know from Imaginatif’s speech and from “Rose-Bush.” The remainder of line 76 recalls the poem’s initial focus on creation and (poetic) fashioning, while line 77 (“No wey wonde but wurch what þou wilt”) draws yet further on the steady rudder of stanza seven. “Do as you desire” is both a lesson to be learned and an acknowledgement that a lesson has been learned.⁸² Adam’s (and by extension, humanity’s) seisin of

heavenly bliss (75–76) results from Christ’s grant. The poet connects salvation with Christ’s teaching by means of an internal chime on the words “tau3te” (64) and “bitau3t” (78).

With the Ascension—the last of the leaps in the poem—yet to come, the poet lingers a moment over Mary and Jesus, imagined together. The language here is reminiscent of the opening of the poem, where they were two excellent flowers on the same stalk (17–20), and it is the first time in the poem that Christ is called by any name, his divine nature now having been made openly known:

Of bounte berestou þe · þe best	
Was neuer no buirde · such beute bare	<i>noblewoman/nobleman/scion/child</i>
Crist of þe com · vre cumfort to kest	<i>ordain, make</i>
To 3elde þe þat · we 3erned 3are	<i>what we yearned for eagerly⁸³</i>
At his stei3ynge · þei stod to stare	<i>ascent</i>
How cleer in Clouden · he cloumben is	
What wy · in þat worpily wonyng ware	<i>man; noble dwelling place</i>
þer miht he fynden · þe Flourdelys	
þus was al þis world · in weere	<i>doubt</i>
þen seide two wy3es · in weedes whyt ⁸⁴	<i>clothes</i>
“To hei3 heuene · what be-holde 3e here?	
Is Ihesu take from 3ow · þus tyd?	
Apeere he schal · in propre plyt	<i>appropriate/noble state</i>
As he in werke · con vanys”	<i>in physical action has experienced ascent</i>
Her afturward hit weore to wite ⁸⁵	<i>it would be worth knowing</i>
Of hire þat bar · þe Flourdelys	

Once again the poet draws attention to Mary’s pregnancy, further linking the virgin and her son through the word “buirde” (82), which emphasizes (noble) lineage and in Middle English is used interchangeably for a noblewoman, particularly the Virgin Mary; a nobleman, or scion; and a child or scion, particularly Christ.⁸⁶ The word thus aptly suits both the botanical theme and the lordship one, and exemplifies the elision of persons typical of medieval botanical metaphor in a religious context. In sound and sense, line 83 (“Crist of þe com vre cumfort to kest”) recalls line 37 (“He com to keuere vs of cares colde”) and continues the themes of ruling (stanzas 1, 3, 4, 5 and 7) and fashioning (stanzas 1, 2, 4, and 10). Following the Gospel in stressing Christ’s physical experience of ascent (94), the poet continues his focus on Jesus’ material body (“Adam and Eue bi hond he hent,” 63; “Bodily boþe in blod and bon,” 71).

As the refrain for stanza twelve suggests, the poet turns back to his original apostrophe to Mary at this point, with an effect similar to a cinematic iris-out, coming round to the circular shape favored by the Pearl-poet.⁸⁷ With Mary’s assumption, he continues the theme of dwelling with the Flourdelys, an idea he had initiated in stanza eleven:

So lelly · his loue · on þe was lent	<i>faithfully</i>	
þi longyng ladi · for to lete		<i>assuage</i>
So semely sondes · after þe he sent		<i>suitable messengers</i>
Be-sydes him-self · to sitte in sete		
þei song al samen · with soun ful swete		<i>in unison</i>
As schewen · and stand · in þi storis		
Wiþ more murþes · mi3t neer mon meete		
But þer to fynde · þe Flourdelys		
Sipen þou · þi worþly wones hast wonnen		<i>since; noble dwelling place</i>
And wones In worschipe · at þi wille		<i> dwell</i>
Vre grith was graunted · vr grace bigunnen		<i>peace/protection</i>
For vs þat was · ordeyned pertille		
Puire dette proueþ bi proper skille		<i>reasoning</i>
Pou schalt vs socour · in þi seruys		<i>service</i>
Þat greifest was · for greuaunce to grille		<i>willing; grieve/suffer</i>
And for to bere · þe flourdelys		

The mention of “þi storis” (102) subtly brings the concept of writing back to the fore, setting up for the mention of the poet himself in stanza fifteen, a complicated and interesting stanza that complements stanza two, the one that mentioned Macer and Cato. Like stanza two, stanza fifteen begins by way of the nobility of the lily and its ubiquitous growth in nature. By line 116 the Fleur-de-lys is not the flower but the divinity, who governs well-being, knowledge, wisdom, and creation:

Of al þe floures · bi Frith · and Felde	<i>forest</i>	
Hit is þe freolokest · for to fynde		<i>noblest</i>
Þat weole & wit · and wisdam welde		<i>eternal bliss</i>
And al þis word haþ wrou3t In wynde ⁸⁸		<i>world; made through the spirit/word</i>
Nou comely kyng · Corteis and kynde		<i>now; courteous</i>
Þat halp vs heere · from vre enemys		
þe mon þat þis matere · made in mynde		
Seide · non is lich · to þe Flourdelys		<i>like</i>
Hedde not Adam · don þat dede		
Vre bitter bales · hed neuer ben bou3t		
On no maner · for no-kenes nede		<i>no kind of</i>
Ne for no werkes · we schuld haue wrou3t		
Al þus I þenk it in my þou3t		
Monkynde for vs · bi-com so chys		<i>fastidious, proud</i>
His Blisful blod · þorw him þei sou3t		
Vs ou3te to prey · to þe Flourdelys		
Nou Marie Mayden · Moder clene		
þi semeli sone · þat beres þe Flour		<i>excellent</i>
3if vs grace · ow to qweme		<i>you both; serve, please</i>
And plese Ihesu · vr saueour		
Bryng vs out of dette · & dedly synne		
To liue and dye · in þi seruys		
Heuene blisse · þat we may wyne		
And wone þer · wiþ þi Flourdelys		<i>live</i>

Like Langland, the “Flourdelys” poet inserts himself, or to be more

precise, a speaker who refers to himself as “þe mon þat þis matere made in mynde” (119), into his poem with an awkwardness born deliberately, it would seem, of his role as a poet.⁸⁹ The “mon” is presumably a learned clerk, in any case a *makere* who contrasts his own *makinge* with the divine work of God. In a refrain that falls rather flat, the “mon” says that “non is lich to þe Flourdelys” (120), reinforcing, by this refrain’s lack of poetic brilliance in a poem that elsewhere dazzles, the message that a *makere* of poems cannot match the Author of Creation, who has wrought so much more in line 116, nor “þe Flourdelys,” who has brought about salvation. In “Flourdelys,” as in other botanical lyrics, the prunable, regenerative growth characteristic of plants suitably expresses the eschatological promise of a generative life force, making its Incarnational deep structure the more effective.

These three botanical lyrics, then, all incorporate the leaps, the broader Truelove tradition, and Marian traditions. They are subtle in their use of the Incarnation as a theme as well as a recurring feature of form, and suggest that we would do well to look more carefully at both religious and secular lyrics as doing a sort of work that is more complex than is implied by terming them “affective” or “didactic.” These poems have a particular sort of work to do, work that engages a reader’s memory and insight. That work depends heavily on form, and engagement with form—perhaps more urgently than it does with theme.

Before leaving the botanical image group, I want to consider the case from the visual arts, the lily crucifixion, for a similarly complex problem in reading. The lily crucifixion intrigues me by answering positively a question I had thought might only have a negative result: what does an Incarnational poetic look like in another medium? Moreover, the lily crucifixion demonstrates that late medieval interest in the Incarnation was not just confined to poetry.

Botanical Imagery in the Visual Arts: The Lily Crucifixion

With the lily crucifixion, the Incarnational image group in play is obviously botanical growth or life force. The range of dates for surviving examples is narrow but the range of locations broad, indicating that the topos spread fairly rapidly and broadly across nearly the whole of England and into Wales from the middle of the fourteenth century to the beginning of the sixteenth.⁹⁰ The fact that so many lily crucifixions have lasted to the present day, despite the

widespread destruction of religious art in England at the Reformation, suggests that the tradition was reasonably well known in its time. Even more intriguingly, no two are alike; further, they were crafted in a wide range of media, meaning that this is not a case of one craftsman or his workshop using and reusing a design.⁹¹ With the exception of the two illuminations, lily crucifixions were intended for public presentation in a church, pointing to a public devotion rather than a private one. Three examples are carved on tombs, indicating that the motif was deemed particularly suitable for thinking about the afterlife, perhaps because of its eschatological promise.

The extant lily crucifixions differ enough that they deserve to be studied in their own right; nevertheless, certain general features are worth further attention here. Although several lily crucifixions survive as isolated images, either they can be shown to have lost their original Annunciation context or that context is implied by the two-handled pot.⁹² Further, the power of the image resides in part in its being the “ground” to the Annunciation’s “figure.” Where the Annunciation context is preserved, the crucifix is not a focus of attention for Gabriel and Mary, who do not acknowledge its presence. In several instances the lily crucifixion is off to the side or off-axis (as in the Welsh illumination); elsewhere, the scale of the lilies and two-handled pot relative to the diminutive Jesus figure indicates that the lily crucifixion likely was not a central focus of the original scene (as at Oxford, and Long Melford). In these cases, the viewer must actively look to see the image. It is as if the artist has counted on our expecting a pot of lilies, and perhaps not looking too closely at the plant for that reason, but then when we notice the Jesus, the surprise draws our attention the more strongly because of its variation from the form we expected, prompting the question, why this, here? What does it mean? The answer must come in the conceptual leap that links historical times: the moment of Incarnation; the moment of Crucifixion; Christ’s Ascension; and the future moment of the viewer’s own anticipated resurrection, promised by the lily’s association with Easter. In this concentrated interplay of death and life, the focus is on life, and particularly on beginnings: Mary’s assent leads to Christ’s conception, birth, death, ascent, return. Unlike the leaps of Christ topos, however, or the Jesse Tree, the way a viewer arrives at such an understanding of moments in time is not precisely, or not necessarily, sequential.⁹³ Rather, the flash of insight that enables a viewer to put several time referents of the image together alternates with the fragmentary view of each individual moment considered all on its own: as I noted earlier, this image points to a way of comprehending both “all at once” and “one at a time.”⁹⁴ While it is possible to choose one point in time on that continuum for one’s meditative focus, the focus of the

Annunciation scene in the foreground is the *beginning* of Christ's life, and the lily crucifixion suggests that all other actions of Christ or moments in his lifetime are to be understood in relation to that.

In cases where the lily crucifixion itself is quite detailed, the juxtaposition between life and death may be seen even without the Annunciation context, as two of the stained glass windows demonstrate. The window at St. Michael at the North Gate exhibits a tense energy that is somewhat lacking from the Holy Trinity window. The patterning of its red backing adds depth to the image, filling in the redness of the blood that is precisely *not* visible on Christ's wounded body. The discrete foliage pattern within that deep red lends it an organic quality, as if it were the inside of a heart or wound. The composition as a whole maintains a thrust upward within the horizontal confines of the narrow window pane. The stretch of Christ's tautly pulled arms is made more severe by the turned-up lilies that are tightly compressed into a narrow space, while the lower lilies enhance this effect by having room to extend their unfolding blooms. They reach outward to the edge of the window, paralleling Christ's arms exactly, while the lilies at the ends of the branches to which he is nailed abruptly shoot upward, reinforcing the central axis, with its tallest bloom. The severity of that upward movement counterbalances the drooping force of Christ's head, which seems to be sinking lower and lower. The intensity of the upward thrust is further amplified by the alignment of Christ's legs with the central axis and also by the slight downward swing of his upper torso. His vulnerability is emphasized by his fully frontal positioning and the spikiness of the leaves that surround his body, as well as by the enormous size disparity between him, the lilies, and the outsized two-handed pot that threatens to engulf him if the rising energy were to cease. Yet the droop of his head and the painful stretch of his arms are no match for that overwhelming upward surge, which, together with the bright color scheme, prevails to emphasize life over death.



Figure 4. Annunciation, Add. MS 17520A, ff. iv-2r, National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth. By permission of Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru/The National Library of Wales.



Figure 5. Lily crucifixion, St. Michael at the North Gate, Oxford. Photograph Fr. Lawrence Lew, O.P.

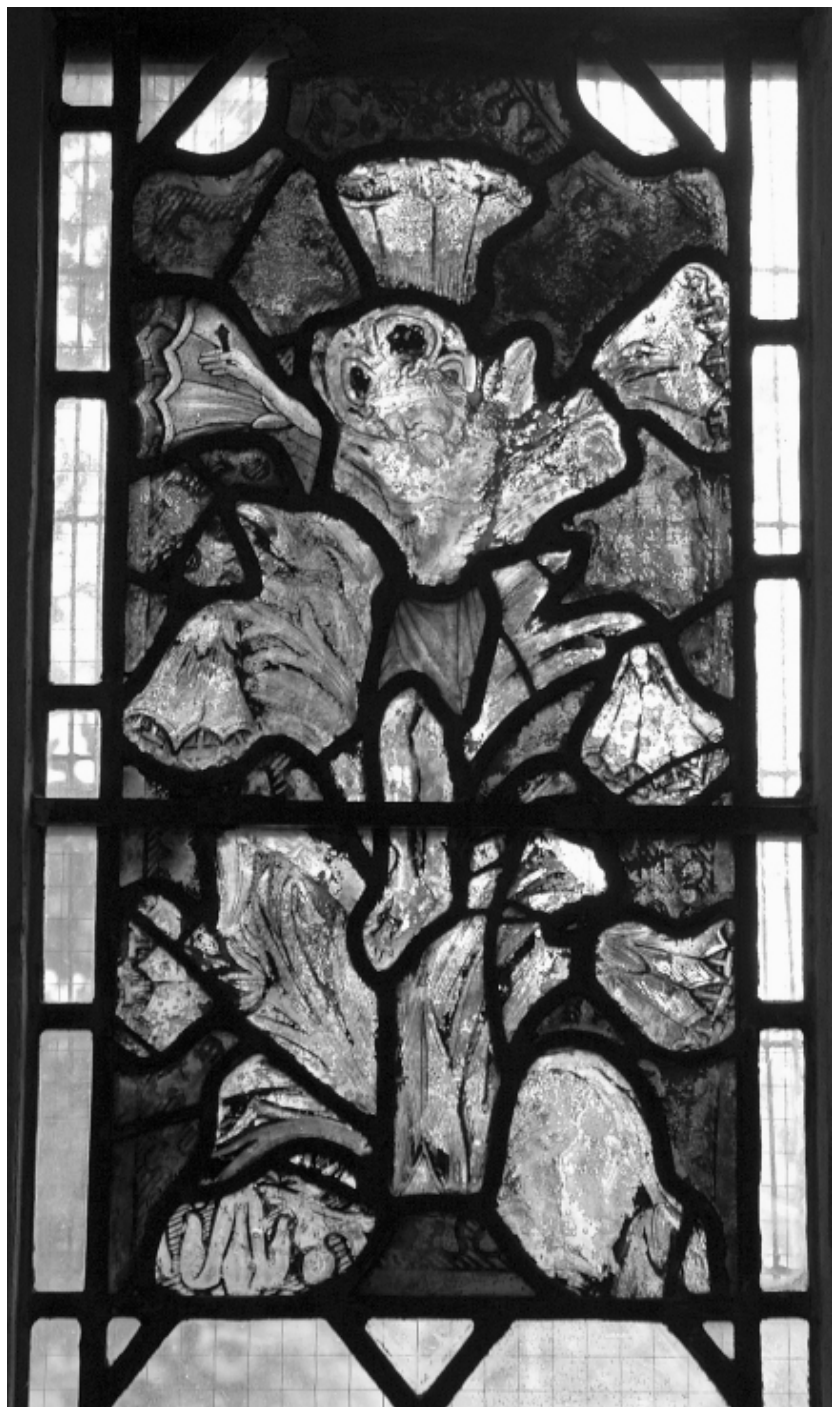


Figure 6. Lily crucifixion, Holy Trinity Church, Long Melford, Suffolk. Photograph Richard Kieckhefer, June 2008.

The Holy Trinity window achieves a similarly vital effect through somewhat different means. This window is obviously much

reconstructed, making it difficult to tell precisely how it might have looked, especially toward the bottom where its pot is missing.⁹⁵ Nevertheless, it is a striking and powerful image. At first glance the subject is somewhat difficult to discern: the muted tones of Christ's flesh and garment blend with the yellow and white of the lilies, the organic swing of his emaciated body mimicking their drooping heads. The blue of the field here lends a cooler meditative tone than does the red of the Oxford glass. Death is suggested by the droop in the lower lilies and counterbalanced by the liveliness of the upper three, with their bell-like trumpets flared to their fullest extent. The eye is encouraged to read in a circular pattern, the lowered blooms leading the gaze down and the lower (reconstructed) foliage and central axis thrusting upward again, directing the gaze to Christ's face. The tonalities of the colors blend the figure of Christ with the lilies so that he seems a natural and organic extension of their growth.

In both examples, movement and compositional restraint push against confining boundaries, and scale prompts a consideration of meaning: why are the lilies so large, the Christ so diminutive? We might be inclined to say that, compositionally and formalistically, the lily crucifixion is secondary to the main action of the Annunciation. Yet contemporary examples of Incarnational poetics in literature correct such a mode of reading, which presupposes that the most important element is prominent: centered and larger than others. Like an Incarnational poetic, the backgrounding quality of the lily crucifixion is central to its effect. Botanical imagery is particularly apt in a context that emphasizes life and regenerative growth. Moreover, in several cases, the artist thought imaginatively about how to extend the botanical imagery beyond the confines of the Annunciation scene and sometimes into the fabric of the church in a way that taps into further Christian imagistic traditions. At Abingdon, for example, the lily crucifixion occurs within a Jesse Tree. In the alabaster at the Victoria and Albert Museum, the lily crucifixion links two separate panels in a sort of Jack-in-the-beanstalk arrangement, with Jesus physically in the Trinity panel above the Annunciation while the words of greeting Gabriel speaks coil down around the lily stalk, demonstrating the combined agency of all three Persons of the Trinity in the emanative action. At Tong, the lily crucifixion on the master's stall is quite close to an extremely interesting bench end depicting Christ and the apostles. This bench end shows the Ascension, or perhaps the establishment of the Church in John 15:5 ("I am the vine; you are the branches"), with grapes on the vine below further suggesting Eucharistic overtones; grapevines further run throughout the carving around the choir area of the church. In an age that saw the proliferation of devotions to Mary and increasing interest in ever-

bloodier remembrances of the Passion, it seems remarkable that this conjunction of two highly popular themes did not spread more widely to illustrations in books of hours or to devotional lyrics: the lily crucifixion appears to have flourished in the visual arts only, primarily in church furnishings, during a certain period of years, in England and Wales. In this connection, it might bear repeating that exhortations to feel Christ's pains are absent from most late medieval writing with a strong Incarnational interest. The Crucifixion is an important part of these works, as it is of the lily crucifixion, but the emphasis is not primarily on the wounds, nor on the blood, nor on Christ's suffering. Just as the lily crucifixion juxtaposes the crucifixion with the incarnational moment from which it flows, an Incarnational poetic suffuses a work by manifesting itself in underlying structures, making the Incarnation an important part of the work as a whole while not focusing attention directly or primarily on the Incarnation itself. Visually intriguing on its own, the lily crucifixion is a surprising find in the visual arts, since its Incarnational basis is textual more than imagistic: how can one recognizably depict what cannot be seen directly—the Incarnation itself, or the hypostatic union? As I have argued, one important aspect of an Incarnational poetic hinges on an underlying structure that rings a series of changes over the Incarnation through repetition with variation. That back-grounded repetition nevertheless suffuses the foregrounded narrative with theologically significant resonance. The lily crucifixion shares this technique, and does so to great effect.



Figure 7. Annunciation, Jesse Tree ceiling, St. Helen, Abingdon, Oxfordshire. Photograph



Figure 8. Annunciation with Throne of Grace, Victoria and Albert Museum, London. By permission of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



Figure 9. Bench end: Christ with Apostles, “I am the vine” (?)/Ascension (front), St. Bartholomew, Tong, Shropshire. Photograph Chris Hunt, March 2012.



Figure 10. Bench end: Christ with Apostles, “I am the vine” (?)/Ascension (back), St. Bartholomew, Tong, Shropshire. Photograph Chris Hunt, March 2012.



Figure 11. Bench end: Christ with Apostles, “I am the vine” (?)/Ascension (back), St. Bartholomew, Tong, Shropshire. Photograph Chris Hunt, March 2012.

In making the hypostatic union so central to the work that form does, an Incarnational poetic encourages a process of thought that comes back again to that good and fundamental beginning. In all of these poems, as in the lily crucifixion, the Incarnation is the pivot point around which thought and form coalesce. By a sort of revolving

motion, as Augustine proposed for his word “word,” each work circles back to its beginning through its middle and its end: in repetition and variation, the seeking of God within poetic and plastic form continually comes round to Christ’s humanity and its affinity with ours.

Conclusion

A child is boren amonges man
And in that child was no wam
That child ys God, that child is man
And in that child our life began.

ALTHOUGH SCHOLARSHIP is shifting the paradigm, many English medieval religious lyrics are still often thought of, in general terms, as treating doctrine in a simplistic way expressive of a rudimentary faith. The achievements of conspicuously brilliant medieval poems, such as *The Dream of the Rood* or *Pearl*, ensure that we recognize that theological poetry in English does not emerge fully formed in the seventeenth century with the great metaphysical poets. Nevertheless, many medieval poems—particularly shorter poems—still tend to be classified as didactic, or affective, or are selectively mined for choice imagery, in ways that threaten to marginalize them, ultimately characterizing them as, at best, simple, at worst, simpleminded; the “Long Charter,” for example, has sometimes been treated this way. Yet the writings I have drawn together here compellingly testify that the work of fourteenth-century English religious writing relies in part on modes of reading that can make considerable demands on readers and writers alike, demands that are not always obvious or intuitive, perhaps.¹ I have maintained that for writers interested in Christ’s humanity, the Incarnation necessitates a special formal awareness, and that late medieval English writers both engage and enact modes of thought that acknowledge an important role for poetics as well as for theology, for poetics as theology. In an important contribution to the growing body of work on formalism in medieval studies, Vance Smith has pointed out that “Form in medieval texts is neither merely aesthetic nor aesthetically disinterested; it is always tuned to a purpose.”² I have argued that the work of Incarnation theology may be in play even where Incarnational issues are not the main topic, that being attentive to form illuminates what writers are saying “pleynly,” and that such attention can further shed light on theories of cognition. By taking advantage of a certain elasticity in the linguistic system,

writers engaging an Incarnational poetic expansively explore the nature of language and thought; the elision between the concrete and the abstract; the complex relationship between acting and being; the work done by poetry itself, in and through time; and the expressive potential latent in large-scale poetic structural forms. Here at the close of my study, I wish to offer a few further thoughts on the work of Incarnational poetics in relation to other sorts of poems, whether medieval or modern.

In the epigraph to this chapter, a stanza from the earliest of English nativity carols (c. 1350), the stark simplicity of the verse's form anticipates the far-reaching consequences of its message. Simple faith is not necessarily simple-minded, of course, and the wonder this stanza seeks to engage and amplify is no mere didacticism, nor is it coincidental that the poem conjoins wonder, strongly marked poetic form, and the topic of the Incarnation. The verse's power lies most strongly in the profound simplicity of its last line as it follows on from the pervasive repetition of "that child." The foundational double-beat of "that child" puts the focus throughout the stanza on the very beginning of life, which the poet emphasizes to give the last line of the verse its compelling force as he yokes "that child"'s new life with "our" new life. *That birth is our birth*, and the cogency of that thought turns on both particularity and generality, how *each* of us is related to *all* of us, *that* one to *this* one. "How are we like him?" the poet encourages us to think, and "how is he like us?". Articulating a message of hope in a new beginning, each line offers the familiar and the extraordinary, yoked together. That same yoking is replicated in the metre, which draws attention to the astonishing mystery of the Incarnation, with the hypostatic union nestled between repetitions of "And in that child" that unite Christ and humanity, and God and humanity. The metre reinforces both the middleness of the hypostatic union and the balance of parts, suspending the regular four-beat rhythm of the other lines by subdividing four into a balanced duple of two-beats, two-beats: "That child ys God, that child is man." The third line thus sets its two halves on equal terms, while the suspension of the regular four-beat rhythm over two-and-two drives additional energy and power into the anticipated fulfillment of metre in the concluding four-beat line, which both wraps up and speaks back to the stanza's beginning. Like linguistic dilation, the metre here fleetingly enacts a certain making-concrete, analogous to the emanation linguistically expressed in the Johannine "Word made flesh." All this suggests to me that, like the works I have been examining, verse of this sort calls on specific reading habits that seek to engage a complexity of thought, off-the-page, prompted by formal juxtapositions, attuned to issues that coalesce around the conceptual

challenge of the hypostatic union.³

While so far as I know the music for this carol does not survive, there is a special aptness to thinking about such complexity in musical terms, or even in dramatic ones, that consider the performative work of thought over time, and perhaps the social work of thought as well. Just as reading the text of a play can be so different from experiencing a performance, the same can be true of song. The experience of a sung carol is complex, not just because of the melodic element but also because the performance in, through, and over time encourages participants and listeners alike to dwell within the experience. Medieval carols and songs make use of long melismatic melodic lines that sometimes pleasingly cross one another, or cross-rhythms, dissonances, and the group-singing of refrains against solo-singing of verses. There is no way to skip ahead, in music, and where the melody lingers over a word or thought, so must the singer. Song of this sort can be deeply meditative. Christmas carols naturally capitalize on the wonder of Christ's nativity, the magnitude of the divine and human brought together with joy, and the *action* of love's spectacular leap. In an Incarnational poetic, wonder—both amazement and questioning—is also inherent to the experience; the focus is on the “how” of the Incarnation, not just the “what” of it.

“A child is boren” prompts wonder through its focus on humanity (rhyming “man” with “man,” for example). The promised growth implicit to “that child” and “our life began” engages further elements that are also characteristic of an Incarnational poetic: action, not stasis; the shift from “now” to “not yet.” The generative force of the quatrain is reinforced by its refrain, which speaks of the “joye” and “blisse” that “we” “shulle” “make,” with “make” being taken up again with the marriage of “Godes Sone” and “ous,” “Godes Sone” becoming “oure make [mate].” The bringing-together implicit to marriage comes across the more strongly for the leave-taking of “the deuel of elle [*from hell*],” who “haght forsake[n]” humanity. In a similar way, in the following fifteenth-century lyric, where balance is key to the poem's effect, wonder is compellingly linked to the topic of the Incarnation, and the poem's meditative force aligns it more closely with the metaphysical poets, perhaps, than with what we generally expect to find in medieval lyric:

A God and yet a man?
A mayde and yet a mother?
Witt wonders what witt Can
Conceave this or the other.

A god, and Can he die?
A dead man, can he live?
What witt can well replie?
What reason reason give?

God, truth itselfe, doth teach it;
Mans witt senckis too farr vnder
By reasons power to reach it.
Beleeve and leave to wonder!⁴

In its direct appeal to wit, this poem is not a simplistic call to stop thinking, despite its culminating call to “leave [cease] to wonder.” These sorts of “wit” poems do not dwell in the serenity of didacticism; they call attention, clarion-like, to the active *work* of wonder. In their quality of working through a puzzle, wherein the solution, insofar as it is attained, lies in part in the reaching of it and in part in experience of poetic form, they have a real affinity with Incarnational poetics of the sort I have been describing. They suggest, to my mind, that we do well when we ponder carefully what form of reading makes this sort of poem productive. The poem turns on several meanings of wonder: to be amazed, surprised, curious, puzzled, to feel admiration, to speculate. The third line fleetingly acknowledges reason’s limit (“Witt wonders what witt can,” or “only as far as wit can”) before the enjambment admits the capability of an intellect beyond the human, the sort of “wit” that “can conceive.” The bounding (limitations) of human wonderment shifts over to bounding (leaps) of a sort of wonderment that *can* be fulfilled (“I wonder what sort of wit could conceive this”), at least in the abstract. The poet further invites us to link ideas by sound (man/mayde/mother; Witt/witt; Can/conceave; this/the other; and the culminating conspicuous witticism of beleeve/leave, which connects back to Can/conceave). The poem is all about wonder, then: thought (our action), pleasing astonishment (our response), the marvelous (God’s action). It prompts us to consider active possibilities, the working-through of thought in form. Time, and the development of thought over time, generates a productive tension as we are encouraged to consider there/then versus here/now, or there/then *as* here/now. The word “leave” in the final line both prescribes and permits: if we are prompted to stop wondering, in one sort of way, we are conspicuously pushed into wondering in another; despite the last line’s prescriptive force, the poem does not shut down the process but opens it up.⁵

Beyond such a focus on the work of wonder, the carol verse I initially quoted further models divine simplicity, which is, in a sense, its topic, and does so by inviting both participation and wonder, of several sorts. As in the works I have been discussing throughout this book, the nature of God and the nature of Christ’s humanity are to be sought within the work of engaging with systemic possibilities latent in poetics, in poetical form and language. With its emphasis on Christian community (the refrain begins, “Honnd by honnd we schulle ous take / And ioye and blisse schulle we make . . .”), the carol affirms

both humility and charity, “us” not “me.”⁶ It is not primarily didactic, but leaves work for its participants to do.

Formal analysis of the sort I have just offered has proven exceptionally fruitful for later theological poetry, as in the work of Donne, Herbert, or Crashaw. It is worth thinking carefully about how our responses to the metaphysical poets might be applied in our reading of medieval ones, and how our approaches to lyric verse such as this carol stanza might correspondingly enhance our readings of other sorts of writing. I am thinking in particular of George Herbert here, because he repeatedly speaks to divine simplicity as a devotional model that can counter the potential dangers of caring too much about the work of being a poet. In “The Quidditie,” for example, Herbert ultimately and surprisingly expresses that turn to simplicity in enigmatical metaphor. His focus is on the work of poetry, poetry as a mode of connection to God. That connection is sustained during the process of work, whether writing or reading (“use,” Herbert calls it), not in its completion:

But it [a verse] is that which while I use
I am with thee, and, *Most take all*.⁷

While, like Capgrave, Herbert does not write “The Quidditie” in the form of an Incarnational poetic, it is from Herbert that I would like to take the cue for the “how” of an Incarnational poetic: it is in the work of poetry, Herbert suggests, that he meets and dwells with God. In “The Quidditie,” a poem’s use is both means and way. As with Hilton’s search for Jesus in the house of the self, *when* you see the glimmer, *then* you have found your drachma—but it is the *search* that enables that sight, and in Herbert’s mode of thought, as in Hilton’s, the glimpse of God in this world is only fleetingly to be maintained, in this world. Herbert’s strategies further and compellingly align with topics I have argued are of special interest in an Incarnational context. He begins by listing what poetry is not, a range of objects or abstractions to be sought, striven for, possessed: a crown, a point of honor, a gay suit,⁸ hawk, banquet, renown, good sword, lute. Shifting to ways in which verse is not like a person, he focuses on actions: it cannot vault, dance, play. He notes particularities of time and place: it “never was in France or Spain.” He evokes social, economic, and political spheres of communal action via synecdoche (“Exchange,” “Hall”). The final lines, which I quoted above, signal a strong shift from *lack* to its emphatic fulfillment: “But it is . . .,” yet a fulfillment that is fleetingly momentary, the “not yet” of earthly life. Like Capgrave, Herbert implies a fullness of thought in the culminating enigmatical metaphor that aspires to express the momentary union with God brought about by reading and writing poetry: “But it is that

which while I use / I am with thee, and *Most take all*.” He signals the high stakes he associates with poetry not only through the trump of “most take all,” an expression associated with a card game, but also through the title, which punningly refers both to the insignificance of the worldly things poetry is not, and also to the essential quality of what poetry is.⁹ For a poet so caught up with divine simplicity, it is suggestive that here simplicity is to be found in Capgrave’s sort of “pleyn” speech that conveys more than it can say directly: in simplicity, Herbert turns not just to poetry but to metaphor.

As I have begun to suggest, an Incarnational mode of thought, with theological implications, may perhaps be found even in late medieval English works that are not structured around an Incarnational poetic. Further, while the proof and ramifications of my next thought stand outside the bounds of this study, the claim holds true even for works that lack a strongly religious or devotional orientation. More remains to be done on Incarnational thought of the period, in poetry but also more broadly. Yet the cognitive component of Incarnational thought, so central to poetical thought experiments of the sort I have examined here, ensures that the work of an Incarnational poetic, evocative of wonder in many senses, well repays the effort of following such conceptual leaps.

Notes

Introduction

Epigraphs: Latin biblical quotations are from *Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam Versionem*, ed. Roger Grayson et al.; English ones are from the Douay-Rheims translation.

1. Luke 2:15: “the shepherds said to one another: [Let us go over to Bethlehem, and let us see this word that is come to pass, which the Lord hath shewed to us].” Unless otherwise noted, quotations from *Piers Plowman* are from *Piers Plowman: The C Version. Will’s Visions of Piers Plowman, Do-Well, Do-Better and Do-Best*, ed. Russell and Kane (hereafter Russell and Kane).

2. The allegorical character who speaks these lines is Imaginatif; in medieval cognitive theory, the imagination is the faculty of the mind that deals with images. See Minnis, “Literary Imagination and Memory”; Karnes, *Imagination, Meditation and Cognition in the Middle Ages*. It is activated in dreaming and memory-work but also in the processing of figurative language, such as metaphor. For more on this passage, see pp. 105–15, below.

3. I am thinking in particular of the work of Nicholas Watson (“Conceptions of the Word: The Mother Tongue and the Incarnation of God”) and David Aers (*Salvation and Sin*; Aers and Staley, *The Powers of the Holy*), who in very different ways have persistently engaged with the theology. On Langland, the work of Sister Mary Clemente Davlin is of particular note, for example, *The Place of God in Piers Plowman and Medieval Art*. Others who have championed the significance of the Incarnation include Elizabeth Kirk (“Langland’s Narrative Christology” and *The Dream Thought of Piers Plowman*); Vincent Gillespie (e.g., “Postcards from the Edge”); Marion Glasscoe (*English Medieval Mystics*); Anne Howland Schotter (“Vernacular Style and the Word of God”); A. V. C. Schmidt (e.g., “Langland and the Mystical Tradition”); Del Chessell (“The Word Made Flesh”); and P. M. Kean (“Langland on the Incarnation”).

4. While Julian’s *A Revelation* (sometimes called the Long Text) was likely completed in the early fifteenth century, it was probably begun in the 1390s. *A Vision*, her earlier text (sometimes called the Short Text), dates from perhaps the mid-1380s. See *The Writings of Julian of Norwich*, ed. Nicholas Watson and Jacqueline Jenkins, 1–2 (hereafter Watson and Jenkins). As Julian notes in the text itself, *A Revelation* is the result of extended thought over time. In this respect, it is more a product of the intellectual climate of the late fourteenth than of the early fifteenth century, whatever its ultimate date of finalization. For the possibility that Julian wrote a version of her showings between *A Vision* and *A Revelation*, a postulated “B-text,” see Newman, “Redeeming the Time,” 18–24. Newman builds on an earlier suggestion by Edmund Colledge and James Walsh, eds., *A Book of Showings to the anchoress Julian of Norwich* (hereafter Colledge and Walsh), 1:24–25. For a contrasting view postulating a clerical amanuensis, see Riddy, “Julian of Norwich and Self-Textualization.”

5. Zeeman, “Imaginative Theory,” 222.

6. Ibid. See also p. 252, n.81, below, on Anne Middleton’s work-in-progress on Langland’s imaginative incorporation of form-based argument derived from school texts.

7. They thus capitalize on the Word’s extraordinary property: two natures in one substantial reality. Cf. Aquinas (*Summa Theologiae*, 3a.2.4): “The person or hypostasis of Christ can be viewed in two ways. As it is in itself, it is completely simple, just as is the nature of the Word [*natura Verbi*]. But considered under the aspect of person or hypostasis, which means subsisting in some nature, the person of Christ subsists in two natures. Hence, although there is a single subsisting reality [*unum subsistens*] there, the style of subsisting is double.”

8. Unless otherwise noted, quotations from Julian of Norwich are from *A Revelation of*

Love, ed. Glascoe, rev. ed. I cite by chapter and line number, including the headnotes in the line count (please note that the line count is slightly different in the 1993 Exeter edition). For a detailed exploration of the word *mene* in Julian's work, see Gillespie and Ross, "The Apophatic Image," 61–64, 67–68; Gillespie, "Postcards from the Edge," 159–60 n. 54, 164–65. On Christ as mediator, cf. Aquinas (*Summa* 3a.26.1): "The distinctive function of a mediator is to bring together those between whom he acts as mediator; for extremities are united in the middle point. Now to unite men with God in the manner of a self-sufficient agent is the office of Christ, through whom men are reconciled with God, *God was in Christ reconciling the world with himself*" (2 Cor. 5:19).

9. In 1995, in response to widespread critical focus on the Passion spurred in part by Caroline Walker Bynum's work on women's body-based devotional practices (e.g., *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*), David Aers argued against a tendency to think of Christ's humanity only in terms of the suffering, bleeding body. He asserted that more than one way of understanding the humanity of Christ was engaged by late medieval thought and that scholars should recognize the range of medieval views ("Christ's Humanity and *Piers Plowman*"). While medieval studies has moved on from that initial affective emphasis (the recent "affective turn" is of rather a different sort), his point is still well taken. Aers expanded and updated his argument in his three chapters of Aers and Staley, *Powers of the Holy*, esp. 15–19.

10. By "scheme" I mean a figure that relies on the arrangement of words; a "trope" brings a "figurative" sense into play.

11. The static/hypostatic wordplay is Nicholas Watson's; personal communication, April 23, 2008.

12. I use the term *figurative* here in its common modern literary critical sense of language that conveys a meaning other than its literal sense. Not all theories about language, or indeed thought, will accommodate this "literal" versus "figurative" divide, however, and the medieval writers who are the subject of this study for the most part do not make use of the dichotomy, even though it was available to them. See further pp. 31–34, below. Figurative language is not necessarily "supereffable," although it may be.

13. 1 Cor. 12:12–27: "For as the body is one, and hath many members; and all the members of the body, whereas they are many, yet are one body, so also is Christ. / . . . / Now you are the body of Christ"; see also Col. 1:18; Rom. 12:4–5; Eph. 4:15–16.

14. *OED Online* (hereafter *OED*), s.v. "gestalt": "A 'shape', 'configuration', or 'structure' which as an object of perception forms a specific whole or unity incapable of expression simply in terms of its parts (e.g., a melody in distinction from the notes that make it up)."

15. The same principle of gestalt underlies the Trinity: one God in three Persons.

16. Quoted by Auerbach, "Figura," 32. Auerbach is quoting *De resurrectione carnis* (now more commonly called *De resurrectione mortuorum*), chap. 20. See also PL 2:821B: "Nam et virgo concepit in utero, non figurate; et peperit Emmanuelem, nobiscum Deum."

17. In theological terms, *substance* is the divine nature or essence, in which the three Persons of the Trinity are united as one; in philosophy, it is a thing that exists distinct from other things, the thing itself.

18. Watson, "Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England," 826.

19. Gillespie's "Vernacular Theology" offers an excellent starting point on this topic.

20. Watson, "Cultural Changes," 130.

21. Benson, "Salvation Theology and Poetry in *Piers Plowman*," 103, 104.

22. The monumental volume of essays that began as papers for the Oxford 2009 "After Arundel" conference offers a striking range of possibilities for thinking about developments in vernacular theology in fifteenth-century England (Ghosh and Gillespie, *After Arundel*). In many cases these essays move away from a tight focus on Arundel and the Constitutions, and in particular they shift away from prevailing scholarly thought that has more and more constrainingly perceived the Constitutions as shutting down vernacular theological discourse. The volume's authors seek to escape from the sort of myopia that may result from dwelling too long in even the most productive of scholarly constructs. Too rigid an adherence to one view of "vernacular theology" can lead to a dangerous "reduction of complexity," in Berndt Hamm's term, which he applied to the dangers incumbent on his own scholarly construct of "normative centering" (*The Reformation of Faith in the Context of Late Medieval Theology and Piety*, 2).

23. Capgrave, *The Life of St. Katherine*, 4.34.2194–96.

24. "For that Almighty God cannot be expressed by any philosophical terms, or otherwise

invented of man . . . we do ordain and specially forbid, that any manner of person, of what state, degree, or condition soever he be, do allege or propone [sic] any conclusions or propositions in the catholic faith, or repugnant to good manners (except necessary doctrine pertaining to their faculty of teaching or disputing in their schools or otherwise), although they defend the same with ever such curious terms and words." John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, 3:246, quoted in Watson, "Censorship," 828, n. 14.

25. Winstead, *John Capgrave's Fifteenth Century*, 60.

26. *Middle English Dictionary* (hereafter *MED*), s.v. "plainli(e)"; *OED*, s.v. "plainly, adv.2," derived from Latin *plene* ("fully, wholly, completely, thoroughly, largely": Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, s.v. "plene" 2, in "plenus"), in addition to *OED*, s.v. "plainly, adv.1," derived from Latin *plane* ("plain, clear, distinct, intelligible": Lewis and Short, s.v. "plane," in "planus [1]"). Nicholas Watson notes John Lydgate's similar use of "pleyn" in that poet's *Fall of Princes*, where "to tell the story 'pleynli' is less to clarify it than to elaborate it into something grander than its *auctor* or patron can have imagined" ("Theories of Translation," 85). Shannon Gayk offers an intriguing reading of the plainness of Capgrave's prologue that usefully complements mine: "Ete this book': Literary Consumption and Poetic Invention," 92–93.

27. Watson has argued that Incarnation theology was a particularly thorny topic specifically because "In some contexts, discussions of the status of the vernacular and the implications of using it for written expression became so involved with theological questions whose roots were in the doctrine of incarnation that language politics and incarnation theology became coterminous" ("Conceptions," 90).

28. Whether Capgrave actually had an English source such as he claims remains unknown. Auvo Kurvinen argues that Capgrave had at least one source, whether in English or Latin—a source derived from an earlier Latin version of Katherine's *vita*: "The Source of Capgrave's *Life of St. Katharine of Alexandria*."

29. See also Minnis, *Translations of Authority*, 104.

30. See n. 21, above.

31. Katherine Zieman's work, for example, or Gayk and Tonry's volume on the fifteenth century.

32. That debate is anticipated, in some respects, in Seth Lerer's 2005 survey of formalist criticism, "The Endurance of Formalism in Middle English Studies," which singles out medieval lyric as a genre that "demands [to] be read formally," and argues that "The formalist approach to Middle English studies . . . should not be limited to classroom close reading or mere appreciation" but should "reveal ways in which our current overarching historicism still contends with the legacy of formalism." See, further, his follow-on article, "'Dum ludis floribus.'" Lerer's views are sympathetically acknowledged by D. Vance Smith, "Medieval *Forma*," on which see further pp. 209 and 282, nn. 2–3 below.

33. Cannon, "Form," 178.

34. *Ibid.*, 179.

35. Nolan, "Beauty," 208.

36. Sacks, ed., *On Metaphor*, [n.p.].

Chapter 1. The "Enigma" of Signification in "Figurative" Language

Epigraphs. When quoting from *Piers Plowman*, I give the C-text citation first and the equivalent B-text citation following a tilde. Unless otherwise noted, B-text citations and quotations are from *Piers Plowman: The B Version. Will's Visions of Piers Plowman, Do-Well, Do-Better and Do-Best*, ed. Kane and Donaldson, rev. ed. (hereafter Kane and Donaldson). English quotations from Augustine's *De Trinitate* are from *On the Trinity: Books 8–15*, trans. McKenna, ed. Matthews; Latin quotations are from *De Trinitate Libri XIII–XV*, ed. Mountain. Quotations from Walter Hilton's *Scale of Perfection* are from Bestul's edition; I have silently reduced initial caps on pronouns that refer to God.

1. 1 Cor. 13:12: "*Videmus nunc per speculum in enigmate: tunc autem facie ad faciem*" / "We see now through a glass in a dark manner; but then face to face."

2. Christ's humanity itself is key to his role as mediator, cf. Aquinas:

We can distinguish two elements in a mediator: firstly, there is the fact of his being an intermediary; secondly, there is his office of bringing together. Now the fact of being an intermediary implies being set apart from both extremes; while, in order to bring these together, the mediator bears what belongs to one over to the other. Neither of these

elements is realized in Christ in so far as he is God, but exclusively in so far as he is man. For as God he is not distinct in nature and lordship from the Father and the Holy Spirit; nor do the Father and the Holy Spirit possess anything which the Son does not possess and which, as belonging to them and not to himself, he might bear to others.

But both elements are realized in Christ as man. (*Summa* 3a.26.2)

3. 1 John 4:8–9:

He that loveth not, knoweth not God: for God is charity.

By this hath the charity of God appeared towards us, because God hath sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we may live by him.

4. A summary of neurological work on metaphor up to 2006 may be found in Lakoff, “The Neural Theory of Metaphor.”

5. Descartes’s thought was, of course, a post-medieval development.

6. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. Shaw, 2:535.

7. It is a happy circumstance that, linguistically speaking, singling out any word in this exemplary fashion (i.e., “the word ‘word’”) is *hypostasis*.

8. Of course, in late medieval England this language would be the vernacular (English or French), explicitly opposed to Latin. Augustine’s distinction among languages is essentially philosophical rather than nationalistic, political, social, or ecclesiastical; the issue carries additional ramifications in late fourteenth-century England, implications not addressed here by Augustine, but ones Capgrave would certainly have recognized.

9. Cf. *De Doctrina Christiana*: “In what way did He come but this, ‘The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us’? Just as when we speak, in order that what we have in our minds may enter through the ear into the mind of the hearer, the word which we have in our hearts becomes an outward sound and is called speech; and yet our thought does not lose itself in the sound, but remains complete in itself, and takes the form of speech without being modified in its own nature by the change: so the Divine Word, though suffering no change of nature, yet became flesh, that He might dwell among us” (*On Christian Doctrine* 1.13.12).

10. In *De Trinitate* he defines allegory as “a trope in which one thing is understood from another” and enigma as an allegory that is particularly difficult to interpret (15.9.15–16).

11. The Holy Name passages do not occur in all textual witnesses, being one important factor in making a stemma to map out the textual tradition. Once the formidable project of editing the entire *Scale* is completed (now underway by Michael Sargent for EETS), there will be better evidence on which to base arguments about Hilton’s engagement with this devotion. For the complicated textual history of the *Scale*, including the Latin translation written by the Carmelite Thomas Fishlake, perhaps in Hilton’s lifetime and certainly by 1400, see Clark and Dorward, trans., *The Scale of Perfection*, 53–57; Bestul, ed., *The Scale of Perfection*, 9–11; Sargent, “Walter Hilton’s ‘Scale of Perfection’”; Hussey, “Latin and English in the Scale of Perfection”; Hussey, “The Text of ‘The Scale of Perfection,’ Book II.”

12. Or, possibly, depicted graphically, as in an image of Jesus.

13. “. . . not only before it sounds, but even before the images of its sound are contemplated in thought” (*De Trinitate* 15.10.19, quoted above, p. 22). “For the thought formed from that thing which we know is the word which we speak in our heart, . . . when we have to bring it to the knowledge of those to whom we are speaking, then some sign is assumed by which it may be made known. And generally this is a sound, but at times also a nod. . . . But letters have also been invented by which we can also speak to those who are absent; but the letters are the signs of words, while the words themselves in our speech are signs of the things of which we are thinking” (*De Trinitate* 15.10.19).

14. “. . . right as a schadwe is maad [made] of a light and a bodi, right so this goostli schadwe is maad of the blissid unseable light of the godhede [Godhead], and of the manhede ooned [united, “one-ed”] therto, and is schewed [shown] to a devoute soule” (2.30.2028–30). See further my discussion at p. 177.

15. Lewis and Short: “Figurativus, a, um, adj., pertaining to the figurative mode of speaking, figurative (late Lat.) . . . subst.: figurativa, ae, f., figurative mode of speaking . . .” R. E. Latham notes the occurrence of *figurativus* in British Latin for “figurative, significant” c. 1115 and c. 1363: *Revised Medieval Latin Word-List from British and Irish Sources*, s.v. “figur/a.”

16. MED, s.v. “figure,” the source of all definitions cited or quoted in this paragraph; see

also OED, s.v. “figure.” Latin *figura* had a long and complicated history in philosophical and linguistic usage, as the Lewis and Short entry suggests, where the word ranges over “*a form, shape, figure* (syn.: *forma, species; tropus*)” to include in its literal senses “*Concr., a sketch, figure, drawing*” (I.1.A.2) and “*Poet., a form, shade, phantom of the dead*” (I.1.B.2); in its figurative senses, “*quality, kind, form, species, nature, matter*” (II), “*Gram. t. t., form of a word, inflection*” (II.B.1), and “*Rhet. t. t., a figure of speech*” (II.B.2), “*Esp., one which contains hints or allusions*” (II.B.2.b). Erich Auerbach’s classic essay on “*Figura*” is still worth consulting on this issue, as is de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*.

17. For example, Jonah in the belly of the whale for three days “prefigures” Christ’s body buried in the earth for three days. Matt. 12:40 provides scriptural justification for the technique: “For as Jonas was in the whale’s belly three days and three nights: so shall the Son of man be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights.”

18. General Prologue, *The Canterbury Tales*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ll. 499–500. Further citations from Chaucer are from this edition.

19. James Simpson has persuasively argued that Langland must have known the very passage from *De Trinitate* I have been considering (“Et vidit deus cogitaciones eorum”).

20. Close readings of *Piers Plowman* must take into account the complications caused by its transmission. The A-text (probably composed in the 1360s), at around 2,500 lines, is considerably shorter than B (c. 1370s, about 7,300 lines) or C (c. 1380s, about 7,340 lines). Most critics believe the three versions are successive redactions (from A to B to C); for the argument that A is an abridged version of B and intended for a lay audience, see Jill Mann, “The Power of the Alphabet.” *Piers Plowman* is extant in 52 manuscripts plus a further 11 fragments or post-medieval copies, of which 18 are of the A-text, including 7 with C-text passages; 16 of the B-text; and 18 of the C-text. The knotty problem of distinguishing scribal variants from authorial revisions has occupied *Piers* editors and critics for decades. The archetype for all extant B manuscripts and, to a lesser extent, the B-text manuscript used as the basis for C, are both thought to have suffered from severe scribal contamination. B and C share the same two final passus, indicating, perhaps, that Langland might have died before he completed C, although for a different explanation that, like Mann’s argument, challenges the A-to-B-to-C hypothesis, see Warner, *The Lost History of Piers Plowman*.

21. See pp. 66–72 on Langland’s complicated treatment of “secte” and “sute.” Jill Mann has thoughtfully and subtly drawn out the nuances of Langland’s imagery of leading and following, in “Power of the Alphabet,” 44–46.

22. Cf. Matt. 18:20: “For where there are two or three gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”

23. In contrast, Chaucer’s Parson explicitly practices what he preaches: “Cristes loore and his apostles twelve / He taughte; but first he folwed it hymselfe” (*General Prologue*, ll. 527–28). Chaucer neatly reinforces the Parson’s “following” of Christ by enjambling the line; both “taughte” and “folwed it” follow on from “Cristes loore and his apostles twelve” without stop.

24. The use of “figure” as “face” can take on a plaintive, intimate tone in Middle English, as in Chaucer’s *Man of Law’s Tale*, where the Sowdan learns to love Custance without having met her, only from hearing the merchants (who did see her) *tell about* how lovely she was (184–89):

Thise merchantz han hym toold of dame
Custance

So greet noblesse in earnest, ceriously,
That this Sowdan hath caught so greet plesance
To han hir figure in his remembrance,
That al his lust and al his bisy cure
Was for to love hire while his lyf may dure.

fame/worthiness; in detail
Sultan; desire
image
desire; desire
last

While it is not clear whether the “figure” he sees is full body or face only (and indeed perhaps it is both, at different times), the syntax parallels her second husband’s wistful recollection of the face of the wife he thinks is dead, called to mind as he gazes, for the first time after a long separation, on the face of their child (1030–35):

Now was this child as lyk unto Custance *like*

As possible is a creature to be.

This Alla hath the face in remembrance
Of dame Custance, and ther on mused he
If that the childes mooder were aught she
That is his wyf, and pryvely he sighte . . .

privately; sighed

In conjunction with the description of the Christ-like Custance led to what she thinks will be her death, these passages taken together remind me of the face-to-face encounter promised in 1 Cor. 13:12 (note that “face” appears four times in these seven lines; the masculine pronoun makes the Christ comparison stronger) (645–51):

seen

Have ye nat seyn somtyme a pale face,
Among a prees, of hym that hath be lad
Toward his deeth, wher as hym gat no grace,
And swich a colour in his face hath had
Men myghte knowe his face that was bistad
Amonges alle the faces in that route?
So stant Custance, and looketh hire aboute.

crowd ('press'); led

such

beset

crowd

stood

Another such in-a-mirror face in Middle English is Crisseid's, in Henryson's *Testament*, when Troilus does not recognize her because of her leprosy, but her face calls to mind the “figure” of his beloved Crisseid; here the potential resonance of 1 Cor. 13:12 combines, perhaps, with 1 Cor. 15:52, “in the twinkling of an eye,” except that in Troilus's instant of genuine recognition, intellectual comprehension is conspicuously lacking. The incident is the more startling for the revelation, available to the reader but not to Troilus, that he has in fact identified her correctly, although he is not aware that he has done so:

Than upon him scho keshap ~~schap~~ ^{his} ~~bot~~ ^{her} ~~her~~ ^{eyes}
And with ane blenk it come into his thocht
That he sumtime hir face befor had sene,
Bot scho was in sic plye he knew hir nocht;
Yit than hir luik into his mynd it brocht
The sweit visage and amorous blenking
Of fair Cresseid, sumtyme his awin darling.
Na wonder was, suppois in mynd that he
Tuik hir figure sa sone, and lo, now quhy:
The idole of ane thing in cace may be
Sa deip imprentit in the fantasy
That it deludis the wittis outwardly,
And sa appeiris in forme and lyke estait
Within the mynd as it was figurait.
(*Testament of Cresseid*, in *The Poems of Robert Henryson*, ll. 498–511)

one blink; thought

such a plight

look

sweet face; glances

own

No

recognized; immediately; why

one; perhaps

so deeply

so appears; similar condition

Both cases rely on a medieval understanding of the image-processing faculty of the mind, the imagination, which governs both sight and recollection, and can (as Troilus wrongly supposes here) deceive by means of fantasy.

25. “Unless you [be converted and] become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 18:3).

26. “. . . is not puffed up; / Is not ambitious, seeketh not her own” (1 Cor. 13:4–5).

27. See Middleton, “William Langland's ‘Kynde Name’.”

28. Or, possibly, “but, to tell the truth, I never saw him [Christ] except as [I see] myself in a mirour.”

29. Context is increasingly an important concept in cognitive studies. One basic outline of issues intrinsic to context may be found in Ungerer and Schmid, *An Introduction to Cognitive Linguistics*, 45–58; a semantics-based argument with an extensive bibliography is Stern,

“Metaphor, Semantics, and Context.”

30. Morton Bloomfield quotes Donald Stewart using this same example but for a different purpose (“Allegory as Interpretation,” 315).

31. This view of metaphor is supported by a psycholinguistic study designed to test whether priming participants with the precise words used as tenor or vehicle would make processing a metaphor easier: “[the results suggest] that the understanding of metaphor involves the emergence of features that are salient characteristics of neither metaphorical term.” Blasko and Connine, “Effects of Familiarity and Aptness on Metaphor Processing,” 304.

32. Riehle, *Middle English Mystics*, 104.

33. Morton Bloomfield situates the problem of “literal” versus “figurative” with regard to metaphor solidly within the literal sense itself:

From a historical point of view, the literal sense is changeable in different degrees, depending on the words used, whether they are still understandable and whether they have changed significantly or not. What was once metaphorical may become literal and vice versa, but all this verbal movement happens within the literal sense. Metaphors belong to the literal sense if they are clearly presented. They differ from the simple literal sense in the fact that they paraphrase only asymmetrically. That is—to take an example given by Donald Stewart—we can say that “Richard is a lion” means “Richard is brave,” but not vice versa. A metaphor’s meaning is very open, and it is determined largely by context. We hesitate to say that “Richard is brave” means “Richard is a lion,” because the metaphor can mean other things out of context. Yet both sentences are on the literal level. (“Allegory as Interpretation,” 315)

34. See, e.g., Colledge and Walsh, 2:336.

35. *MED*, s.v. “pointe n.1.” The notion of “point” as “a small portion of time, an instant, a moment” comes from the Latin *punctum* (Lewis and Short, s.v. “*punctum*,” sense I.2.c).

36. Watson and Jenkins (162, n. to 11.1) privilege this sense: “A point in space, not time, as line 16 makes clear.” They additionally offer the observation that “A ‘point’ is also a subdivision in an argument or a full stop in a sentence.”

37. *Patience*, in *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript*, l. 35. Laurence Eldredge explores the scholastic philosophical controversy over the nature of a point (whether a continuum could be infinitely divisible or not), claiming, “The poet insists that patience is a point, not merely by means of the repetition in the first and last lines of the poem, but also by stressing its place as the last of the eight beatitudes and thus the point with which the line of beatitudes ends” (“Late Medieval Discussions of the Continuum,” 110). The philosophical context underscores how aptly the word “poynte” suits Julian’s purpose: the *Pearl*-poet erases the distinction of beginnings and endings, since as both beginning and ending of blessedness, patience is an indivisible state of being and a foundational virtue.

38. Minnis and Scott, “Scriptural Science and Signification: From *Alexander’s Sum of Theology* to Nicholas of Lyre,” in *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism*, c. 1100–c. 1375: *The Commentary Tradition*, esp. 239–43, 266–76. As Aquinas puts it (242, *Summa* 1a.1,10):

But because the literal sense is that which the author intends, while the author of Holy Scripture is God who comprehends everything all at once by His understanding, it seems consistent with this that, as Augustine says in the twelfth book of *The Confessions*, there should be several meanings in one passage of Scripture, even when interpreted literally.

39. “. . . even in these instances, some words are used figuratively, as for example, ‘the wrath of God’ and ‘crucified.’ But these are not so numerous, nor placed in such a way as to obscure the sense, and make it allegorical or enigmatical, which is the kind of expression properly called *figurative*” (*On Christian Doctrine* 3.11.17).

40. Gibbs, “The Fight over Metaphor in Thought and Language,” 114.

41. Nevertheless, the same linguists continue to distinguish “literal” and “nonliteral” usages.

42. Sweetser, *From Etymology to Pragmatics*, cited in Gibbs, *The Poetics of Mind*, 158–61.

43. See, for example, Searle, “Metaphor”; Davidson, “What Metaphors Mean”; Grice, “Logic and Conversation.” However, psycholinguistic studies are increasingly demonstrating results incompatible with Searle’s model. See, e.g., Frisson and Pickering, “The Processing of

Familiar and Novel Senses of a Word”; Brisard, Frisson and Sandra, “Processing Unfamiliar Metaphors in a Self-Paced Reading Task”; Blasko and Connine, “Effects of Familiarity”; see also further studies cited in Blasko and Connine, 296.

44. *The Cloud of Unknowing*, 61.30–35, ed. Hodgson, 63.

45. As Tony Spearing has remarked, this phrase is difficult to say without the speaker becoming excessively aware of the physicality of his own tongue (*The Cloud of Unknowing and Other Works*, xxviii).

46. The Cloud-author’s purpose in pointing out the dichotomy is quite specific to the practice of contemplative exercise; he considers the nature of language only insofar as he needs to in order to make his points. While Vincent Gillespie’s endorsement of Denis Renevey’s suggestion that “a goostly conseyte of a bodely þing” could be the Cloud-author’s term for metaphor is intriguing (“Postcards from the Edge,” 150), it seems to me that the Cloud-author wants metaphor to operate in both directions (“goostly” to “þing” explains characteristic features of the Cloud-author’s language and style (“Fantasy and Language in *The Cloud of Unknowing*,” 292ff.).

47. This interpretative problem is similar to the one I discussed in regard to Julian seeing God in a “poynte”: in an instant or in a (mental) place (see p. 37).

48. Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 14–35; see also Macy, “The Dogma of Transubstantiation in the Middle Ages”; Macy, *The Theologies of the Eucharist in the Early Scholastic Period*.

49. I have drawn the phrase “language of religion” from Miri Rubin’s introduction to her important work on the feast of Corpus Christi (body of Christ). Rubin explains that her project evolved from what she thought would be a social history to a larger cultural investigation requiring her to interpret the development of thought over time as if it were a sort of “language of religion.” An especially compelling aspect of the shift she perceived is the increasing focus on “that language, the system of meanings”: “Inspired by the diversity of such utterances and the ubiquity of eucharistic symbols within the medieval culture, we must attempt to expound the language of religion in order to understand the variety of its expression. This book aims to penetrate that language, the system of meanings within which the eucharist possessed so central a position” (*Corpus Christi*, 5). By “language of religion,” of course, Rubin points toward a way of thinking she is interested in. More significantly, however, she chooses to get at that concept by highlighting its systematic quality, calling it “language.” With the Eucharist at the heart of her study, perhaps it is not surprising to find that Rubin would envision the unfolding nature of her project as inherently language-based.

50. Alexandra Barratt has drawn attention to the *Dixit Dominus*-style Trinity in the Ormesby Psalter, which was on display in the choir of Norwich Cathedral during Julian’s lifetime. Barratt argues that Julian’s warning about how not to envision the Trinity might have been a response to an illumination such as this one (“‘No such sitting’: Julian Tropes the Trinity”).

51. For the Cloud-author’s interpretation of spatial terms, particularly “in” and “up,” see Burrow, “Fantasy and Language.”

52. For the theory that different types of metaphor are processed in various ways and complex metaphor is processed like analogy, see Kintsch, “The Mind Computes the Meaning of Metaphor.”

53. By comparison, the problem of “up” and “down” is one of the first examples Peter Stockwell advances in his introductory-level text on cognitive linguistics. He explains GOOD IS UP by recourse to embodied experience:

Most simply, we think in the forms that we do and we say things in the ways that we do because we are all roughly human-sized containers of air and liquid with our main receptors at the top of our bodies. Our minds are “embodied” not just literally but also figuratively, finally clearing away the mind-body distinction of much philosophy most famously expressed by Descartes. To give a simple example (suggested by my colleague Tony Bex), one possible cognitive reason why we chop trees *down* but we chop wood *up* is that trees are bigger than us but are on the ground below us once they have been felled. Another cognitive solution sees these directional features as deriving from underlying metaphor in which “good is up” and “bad is down.” Trees are unified “good” wholes when they are upright, and firewood is more usefully “good” when it is chopped from fallen trees. (Stockwell, *Cognitive Poetics*, 4–5)

Stockwell's explanation for why good is up is based on an unconvincing premise with respect to chopping trees up versus chopping them down, however, because the "up" in "chopping up" is not a spatial term. "Up" is a marker of finality or completion here, as it would be in "break up" or "seal up" or even in cases such as "button up" and "beat up [some eggs]" or "beat up [a person]," as the *OED* entry for "up, adv1" makes clear: "18. To or towards a state of completion or finality. (Frequently serving merely to emphasize the import of the verb.) a. With verbs denoting consuming or destroying. . . . b. With other verbs, denoting progress to or towards an end." Stockwell's error, however, demonstrates all the more clearly how committed this strain of cognitive linguistics is to embodiment as a basis for metaphor and metaphor as a basis for thought. Physical experience of the world, not abstract thought alone, really counts here. Spatial orientation is just one aspect in which it counts.

54. For an extended discussion of how Hilton and Julian differ in their treatment of Augustine's thought, see Baker, "The Image of God," 35–60.

55. Denise Baker's investigation of these terms is helpful (*Julian of Norwich's Showings*, esp. 119ff.). For an excellent concise synopsis of the Augustinian background of these terms and a comparison of Julian's use with that of Walter Hilton, see also Baker, "The Image of God," esp. 44–49, 52–53. I disagree, however, with her assertion that "Julian uses the terms *substance* and *sensuality* to refer to the two parts of the soul corresponding to Augustine's higher and lower reason" and her further conclusion that "paradoxically, the soul is both enclosed by and enclosing God"; "Julian of Norwich and the Varieties of Middle English Mystical Discourse," 61, 62. Nicholas Watson works through substance and sensuality as a hermeneutic tool in combination with the structures encoded in misogynistic discourse: "'Yf women be double naturelly,'" 20–29, 32. David Aers discusses the consequence for Julian's soteriology of "her doctrine that our souls have a higher and lower part with two distinct wills": *Salvation and Sin*, 168, 156–71.

56. Margaret Ann Palliser is more precise in her wording on this point than are many Julian scholars: "In his own person, Christ unites sensuality (that part of the human structure which constitutes our separateness from God but which, therefore, allows for the possibility of *separatedness*, i.e., sin) to substance (the truth of our being which is never separated from God)." Palliser, *Christ, Our Mother of Mercy*, 45. See also her clarification in n. 147, p. 50, an attempt to explain Julian's characterization of Christ's soul as "fullest substance" (53.59).

57. See also 44.16–17: "man soule is a creature in God, which hath the same propertyes made."

58. She does, however, refer to Christ's soul, e.g.:

Wherefore he will we wettyn [*know*] that the noblest thing that ever he made is mankynd, and the fullest substance and the heyest vertue is the blissid soule of Criste. And furthermore he will we wettyn that his derworthy [*dear-worthy*] soule was preciousley knitt to him in the makeing; which knott is sotil [*subtle, ethereal*] and so myty that is onyid into God; in which onyng it is made endlesly holy. (53.58–63)

59. E.g., "so arn we, soule and body, cladde in the goodnes of God and inclosyd" (6.41–42); "he should be save in body and soule" 10.26–27); "And what tyme that our soule is inspirid into our body" (55.19–20); "the worshipfull onyng that was thus made of God betwix the soule and body" (55.47–48). See also my "The 'Soule' Crux in Julian of Norwich's *Revelation of Love*." I read the famous "excretion" passage in chapter six as describing death, the release of the soul from the body, as opposed to the reading most recently championed by Watson and Jenkins, who argue ". . . 'soule' is probably a spelling of 'saule'/'sawlee' (French *saulee*), food or meal, a common word in late Middle English" (142). For an extended argument that this passage describes excretion, and moreover "reinscrib[es] the female upon what is ostensibly an image of the universal male body, and assert[s] the equal value of the female as an expression of, and a means of accessing, the divine," see McAvoy, "' . . . a purse fulle feyer,'" 100.

60. An exception is Kittay and Lehrer, "Semantic Fields and the Structure of Metaphor."

61. See, for instance, Coulson and van Petten, "Conceptual Integration and Metaphor": "When the metaphoric interpretation of a sentence has adequate contextual support, metaphors are read no more slowly than literal language"; "readers take longer to reject statements that are literally false but metaphorically true than to reject nonmetaphoric false statements"; "following metaphors rated as *apt* (viz. readily interpretable), lexical decisions

for target words related to figurative meanings were made just as fast as those for targets related to literal meanings"; "In contrast to the standard model, current processing models of metaphor comprehension all assume that literal and nonliteral language comprehension invoke the same mechanisms" (958–59); see Coulson and van Petten for the relevant studies.

62. Frisson and Pickering, "Obtaining a Figurative Interpretation." See also Pickering et al., "Underspecification and Aspectual Coercion"; Frazier and Rayner, "Taking on Semantic Commitments."

63. Frisson and Pickering, "Obtaining a Figurative Interpretation," 159.

64. Weller Embler's notion of the fuzziness of ordinary discourse complements this view of language processing by offering an analogue from the writer's (or speaker's) side:

In everyday life when we are not making an effort to be lucid and to put our thoughts into scrupulously logical order, they seem indeed to be vague, mere guesses or sighs or phatic sounds that vanish like puffs of smoke in the air. Yet we manage, roughly, to get along. Indeed, this gossamer obscurity at the border between thought and vacuity, this vagueness at the margin, may be a kind of protection against mental rigidity, against making up our minds too soon, indulging in over-simplified evaluations. (*Metaphor and Meaning*, 30–31)

65. Clark and Gerrig, "Understanding Old Words with New Meanings," 606; see also Frisson and Pickering, "Processing of Familiar and Novel Senses," esp. 606–7; Rapp and Gerrig, "Eponymous Verb Phrases and Ambiguity Resolution"; Gerrig, "The Time Course of Sense Creation."

66. Frisson and Pickering, "Obtaining a Figurative Interpretation," 159.

67. Kelly and Keil, "Metaphor Comprehension and Knowledge of Semantic Domains," 43–44.

68. Allbritton, "When Metaphors Function as Schemas," 41.

Chapter 2. Elisions of Abstract and Concrete, Epitomized in a "True-love"

Epigraph: (1) Fein, ed., *Moral Love Songs and Laments*, 68.

1. In my discussion, I will use "true-love" for the plant, "Truelove" for the tradition, "true love" for the concept invoked in a poem where what is signified is ambiguous, and "trewe loue" or other Middle English spellings for a specific reference (taking the spelling from the source I cite).

2. These are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Following the theology of Pseudo-Dionysius, for example, *eros* may be seen to underlie the emanative flowing forth of God's love (*proodos*) and its return from created to Creator (*epistrophe*).

3. Cervone, "Langland and the Truelove Tradition." This article examines two passages in Langland's C-text that mention "true love," arguing that the passages' botanical and Incarnational contexts suggest that Langland's references should be considered in light of the "Truelove tradition." Portions of the "Truelove" section of this chapter that explain the nature of the Truelove tradition previously appeared in this article.

4. Again we might recall Capgrave's "straunge doubtes" and his interest in the signifying potential of the vernacular (see p. 9).

5. "Sermon S-07, *Amore languet*," 226–27 (boldface in quoted text, emphasis mine).

6. "Crux Christi" is first attested in the thirteenth century; the leaves of the plant form a cross shape: von Schroff, *Historische Studie über Paris Quadrifolia L.*, 1:3–6. The plant is also known as four-leaved grass, one-berry, herb Paris, *Paris quadrifolia*, true-love knot, and true lover's knot, among other things. Although he primarily concentrates on other areas of Europe, for an extensive discussion of the plant's various names, see von Schroff, esp. 1:3–48. He treats "true-love" only briefly (1:40). On Mary exemplifying and carrying "true love" bodily, consider the brief but hauntingly evocative Annunciation lyric "At a sprynge wel vnder a þorn," no. 130 in Brown, ed., *Religious Lyrics of the XIVth Century* and frequently anthologized (229, ll. 5–6):

Ho-so wol seche trwe loue,
yn hyr hyt schal be founde.

Does Mary herself exemplify true love, or will she carry it bodily in the form of her child, or

both?

7. In “Truelove,” for instance (ll. 40–67), “In a Valley of this Restless Mind” (ll. 1–3), or “At a sprynge wel vnder a þorn” (for a useful reading of this poem in this context, see Gray, *Themes and Images*, 92–94).

8. The lover-knight motif draws on chivalric love conventions, casting Christ as the wooing knight who loves a besieged or disdainful lady, man’s soul. To attain her hand, he fights a formidable opponent and wins but is slain. The lady gathers and treasures his bloodied knightly gear. This well-known topos has received extensive treatment in critical literature; see, e.g., O’Mara, ed., *Four Middle English Sermons*, 66, 154–55, 190; Woolf, “The Theme of Christ the Lover-Knight”; Gray, *Themes and Images*, 131–43; le May, *The Allegory of the Christ-Knight*. The *chanson d’aventure* offers a narrative framework in which a usually aristocratic and sometimes dreaming subject wandering through nature encounters an authoritative didactic figure (not always human—frequently a bird).

9. Caroline Walker Bynum called attention to the trope of Jesus as mother in the early 1980s, sparking a flurry of critical interest, particularly in discussions of Julian’s *Revelation*. For a brief background of the relevant treatments of the theme in writings of the early Church, see Bradley, “Patristic Background of the Motherhood Similitude.”

10. This beautiful poem is frequently anthologized under various names, including “*Quia amore langueo*” (not to be confused with the similarly lyrical Marian poem with the same refrain but otherwise called “In a Tabernacle of a Tower”). I quote here from Fein’s edition in *Moral Love Songs*, 71.

11. Gray, *Themes and Images*, 58; the Latin reads “lament of Christ languishing for love.” The poem he quotes is no. 110 in Brown, *Religious Lyrics of the XVth Century*.

12. *Political, Religious, and Love Poems*, 262.

13. This is much like a variant of the “figure” and “ground” relationship I described with reference to the lily crucifixion, only here neither predominates. See p. 17, above.

14. See, for example, “Sermon S-07, *Amore langueo*,” “The Lily with Five Leaves,” no. 19 in Brown, ed., *Religious Lyrics of the XIIIth Century*; “Truelove”; *Fasciculus Morum*, 198–99, 614–15. In “The Lily with Five Leaves,” the plant whose leaves are numbered is the lily, not the true-love. However, as in other Truelove poems, the leaf scheme enumerates types of charity. In this case, the first leaf is associated with “treve loue” which springs from loving the Lord “vid word vid horte vid al þi mist” (8, 7).

Instruction on how to make a proper confession was an important aspect of educational programs for laity and clergy alike undertaken after the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, such as Archbishop John Pecham’s Lambeth Constitutions of 1281 and Archbishop William Thoresby of York’s similar legislation of 1357. Such efforts were aimed at making sure that parish priests instructed the laity in fundamental elements of the faith at least once a year; the regulations placed particular and new emphasis on the sacraments of penance and Eucharist. If priests were to instruct, they must themselves be instructed; an important component of the reform recognized that priests’ training and literacy were not always adequate to the new requirements. As one way to remedy the situation, the reform effort promoted the widespread promulgation of penitential manuals, such as *The Book of Vices and Virtues*, Robert Mannyng’s *Handlyng Synne*, and more general instructional works such as John Mirk’s *Instructions for Parish Priests*. The penitential manuals outlined the steps for the fullest possible confession in extensive detail, spiced with exempla (exemplary stories, usually derived from Gregory’s *Dialogues* or other common stock) to add interest (Chaucer’s *Parson’s Tale* is a useful example). They also enumerated fundamental elements of the faith, which priests were to explain from the pulpit at least once a year (e.g., the seven sacraments, the ten commandments). Most of these manuals were intended for clergy rather than laity. The treatment of penance in such didactic works makes an explicit delineation of its stages instantly recognizable even when couched in metaphor, as in the true love passage of the “Long Charter.” On penitential manuals, see Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 53–77; Owst, *Preaching in Medieval England*, 281ff.; Pantin, *The English Church in the Fourteenth Century*, 191–234; Arnould, *Le Manuel des péchés*, 1–59.

15. The four stages enumerated on the leaves in the “Long Charter” are somewhat unusual: open confession, contrition, determination not to repeat sin, and fear of God. Yet, as Chaucer’s Parson demonstrates, the sacrament requires some form of “satisfaction” that makes amends for or repairs the offense: “Now shaltow understande what is bihovely and necessarie to verray parfit Penitence. And this stant on three thynges: Contricioun of Herte, Confessioun

of Mouth, and Satisfaccioun" (*Parst*, 106–7). *Piers Plowman* highlights satisfaction with particular insistence by emphatic treatment of *Redde quod debes*, "pay what you owe" (B.19.187, 259, 390; C.6.315, 21.187, 193, 259, 390). Cf. Rom. 13:7–8: "Render therefore to all men their dues. Tribute, to whom tribute is due: custom, to whom custom: fear, to whom fear: honour, to whom honour. / Owe no man any thing, but to love one another. For he that loveth his neighbour, hath fulfilled the law". Although it seems strange that the "Long Charter" does not include satisfaction as one of the stages, the text as we have it may be corrupt here: the A-text manuscripts show considerable variations among these lines. The fourth leaf as it stands in the A-text also appears to have confused the B-reviser, who regularizes it to substitute penance for fear of God, e.g. (B-text, l. 206) Camb. Ff.2.38 (Spalding's MS "B" of the B-text): "The fourþe do þy penaunce mekely þerto." Whether A.124 is corrupt or not, it is difficult to explain the true love passage as anything but a poetic transformation of instructional materials on penance, a transformation that adds the singularly appropriate exhortation to seek the true-love in Christ's wounds. Unless otherwise noted, quotations from the Charters of Christ are from Spalding, *The Middle English Charters of Christ* (hereafter "Spalding"). Except where noted, "Long Charter" quotations from the A-text are from BL Add. 11307 as printed by Spalding, 18–42, confirmed or corrected by reference to the manuscript itself.

For the possibility that the original A-text of the "Long Charter" was written by someone with close ties to the preaching guides and penitential manuals associated with the thirteenth-century instructional programs, see Cervone, "Love's Leap," 76–86. A key issue is the combination of charter and clothing imagery in devotional poems such as Franciscan William Herebert's early fourteenth-century lyric *Pou wommon boutte uere* ("You, woman without equal"). As C. Meier-Ewert has shown, *Pou wommon boutte uere* draws on imagery from two Anglo-Norman poems attributed to another Franciscan, Nicole Bozon (*Le mel de ceel*, for Christ's flesh as garment, and *Douce dame pie mere*, for the charter); see Meier-Ewert, "The Anglo-Norman Origin of *Thou Wommon Boutte Uere*," 424–28.

Douce dame pie mere is embedded in a prayer to the Virgin in Book IX of the *Manuel des Pechiez*; that prayer is missing from only two of the twenty-five extant manuscripts, all of which were written out between 1275 and 1325 and circulated widely throughout England, from Durham to the Isle of Wight; see Sullivan, "Readers of the *Manuel des Péchés*," 233, 241–42. Although the *Manuel des Pechiez* was translated into Middle English by Robert Mannyng and enjoyed wide circulation in England as *Handlyng Synne*, Mannyng did not translate Book IX. On the complicated textual history of the *Manuel des Pechiez*, its authorship, and audience, see also Sullivan, "A Brief Textual History of the *Manuel des Péchés*"; Sullivan, "The Author of the *Manuel des Péchés*"; Legge, *Anglo-Norman Literature and Its Background*; Legge, *Anglo-Norman in the Cloisters*; Laird, "Character and Growth of the *Manuel des Pechiez*"; Arnould, *Le Manuel des péchés*; Allen, "The Mystical Lyrics of the *Manuel des Pechiez*"

16. When Julian of Norwich describes Christ's wound as "large enow [enough] for al mankynd that shal be save to resten in pece and in love," she prefaces the image with a characterization of the wound as "a faire delectabil place" (24.6), a direct translation of *locus amoenus*; she does not, however, press the garden or meadow imagery, as does the "Long Charter" poet.

17. In 1814, William Bateman published the medieval parchment roll in codex form; from this, we can infer the text and, perhaps, some illustrations that may have accompanied the original roll (some pictorial aspects of Bateman's edition are clearly nineteenth century in origin). The text (only) is reprinted by Axon, "The Symbolism of the 'Five Wounds of Christ,'" 71–75. Axon's version contains several errors of transcription even beyond those that can be attributed to Bateman, who attempted to reproduce his original's abbreviations but evidently overlooked quite a few; Bateman occasionally also appears to have misread the Middle English. Nevertheless we are extremely fortunate to have his limited edition of only forty copies, notable in and of itself as an interesting later representation of a medieval manuscript roll reformatted as a printed codex. See Billyng, *The Five Wounds of Christ*.

18. Kail, *Twenty-Six Political and Other Poems*, 73–79; also printed in Barr, ed., *The Digby Poems*, 241–51. "Loue that god loueth" and the "Long Charter" share not only the enumeration of the leaves of the true-love but also the charter trope; their treatment, however, differs sharply.

19. My thinking on social personhood has been influenced by Fowler, *Literary Character*.

20. The Jesse Tree depicts the genealogy of Christ visually; the imagery usually entails a

recumbent Jesse with the tree growing from his body; various ancestors of Christ are shown on appropriate branches, with the Virgin and Child at the top. As Gertrud Schiller notes, “the Tree of Jesse, [is] itself a symbol of God’s Incarnation.” *Iconography of Christian Art*, 1:20.

21. Greene, *The Early English Carols*, no. 175a.

22. Thomas D. Hill has convincingly argued that while these events may at first suggest the Five Joys of Mary, the more probable scheme is the leaps of Christ. “Mary, the Rose-Bush’ and the Leaps of Christ.” On the leaps, see Chapter 3.

23. Often Jesus also is called a rose. Where Mary is a rose, Jesus may be a lily, and vice versa, as, for example, in this late fifteenth-century example, “A roose hath borne a lilly white, / The whiche floure is moost pure and bright” (Greene, *The Early English Carols*, no. 174, ll. 11–14):

As the sonne beame goth thurgh the ~~gode~~ ^{gode} shrough
Thurgh this roose that lilly did pas
To save mankynde, as his wille was,
The whiche floure is moost pure and bright.

pass

24. “Maiden Mary and her Fleur de Lys,” in Brown, *Religious Lyrics of the XIVth Century*, no. 112. Because the editorial punctuation is occasionally misleading, I reproduce the pointing from *The Vernon Manuscript: A Facsimile of Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Eng. poet. a. 1*.

25. The “segge” appears to be God the Father, or perhaps the Trinity.

26. In lines 19 and 20, does the poet mean, “the most praiseworthy blossom had to have been one of you two, because you both were so beautiful that neither was the more excellent and both were more excellent than any other lily flower”? Or, “was truly that [familial relationship] between you two”? Or, perhaps, “was truly that [which] was [brought about] between the two of you,” i.e., salvation?

27. Elizabeth Salter has pointed out a visual image that appears to illustrate such a concept, “a single manuscript painting [that] may elucidate some of the processes which went to the making of [Langland’s] famous metaphor of love as the ‘plant of peace.’” This illumination, in a fifteenth-century prayerbook made for the Talbot-Beauchamp family, depicts both Virgin and Child within the large bell of an open lily flower springing from a stalk; two closed blossoms spring from either side of the stalk, lower down. Salter, “Piers Plowman and the Visual Arts,” 264 and plate 8.

28. Among the relevant definitions are these, from the *MED*: s.v. “*sect(e)*”:

1. (a) A class of people or things, sort, kind; (b) a species, race; (c) a bodily form, likeness; **in oure** ~, in our likeness, in human flesh; (d) those of a certain way of thinking or acting, esp. as parties in a controversy or lawsuit . . . 2. . . . (b) a group within an organized religious body which adheres to a special set of doctrines and practices, a branch of a religious faith; (c) a religious order within the Christian church; the body of members of such an order; a body of clerics, as clerks, canons, etc.; also, one of the broader categories of believers within the Christian church, as the clergy, laity, etc. . . . 3. (a) A body of followers, a train, retinue; a faction, party . . .

s.v. “*sute*”:

1a. (a) A set of garments or liturgical vestments meant to be worn together, an ensemble; a livery . . . (b) a set of matching garments worn by different persons; a matching livery, matching garb . . . (c) *fig.* the human flesh; **in oure** ~, in the flesh. . . . 2. (a) A band of followers; a retinue, company . . . 3. (a) Pursuit, chase . . . 6a. *Law.* (a) A lawsuit; a legal action undertaken to redress a wrong . . .

29. See pp. 51–54, above.

30. The prayer comes relatively early in the narrative. The poem, a dream vision, begins with a prologue in which the dreamer perceives the corrupt state of the world, in which the whole range of humanity is represented in the “field full of folk,” where self-interest seems to drive most actions. The same corruption is seen in civic government at Westminster and in

ecclesiastical government. Lady Holy Church appears, then explains what the dreamer is seeing and answers his question, how can he save his soul? Her answer expands on the nature of charity, with specific reference to governance of an individual, the monarchy, and the Church. The dreamer next perceives a complicated allegorical vision of corruption exemplified by Meed the Maid, whose character and lineage are debated before the king. The king's advisors, Conscience and Reason, are unable to counsel him in a way that will resolve the dispute. The king calls for reform, but governmental reform is not enough. Reason admonishes the folk to repent their sins and search for Truth. The Seven Deadly Sins are the first to confess. Then Repentance calls on the people to kneel, and speaks the prayer that is the passage in question here. In C, *Verbum caro factum est* also occurs in the grammatical analogy of passus 3.

31. Among the many useful critical treatments of poverty in *Piers Plowman* are Crassons, *The Claims of Poverty*; Aers, *Sanctifying Signs*, 99–156; Scott, *Piers Plowman and the Poor*; Kim, “Hunger, Need, and the Politics of Poverty”; Shepherd, “Poverty in *Piers Plowman*”; Pearsall, “Poverty and Poor People in *Piers Plowman*”; Szittyta, *The Antifraternal Tradition in Medieval Literature*; Aers, “*Piers Plowman* and Problems in the Perception of Poverty”; Adams, “The Nature of Need in ‘*Piers Plowman*’ XX.”

32. Critics have disagreed over whether to take Need’s argument at face value or to consider his opinion potentially specious, given that he represents neediness itself. The range of critical positions is examined most recently by Barney, *The Penn Commentary on Piers Plowman*, 5:187–97. See also Galloway, “The Economy of Need in Late Medieval English Literature”; Green, “‘Nede ne hath no lawe’”; Zeeman, *Piers Plowman and the Medieval Discourse of Desire*, 276–83; Mann, “The Nature of Need Revisited”; Hewett-Smith, “‘Nede ne hath no lawe’”; Adams, “The Nature of Need.”

33. Russell and Kane choose “seute” for “secte”: “seute] YP2D2UDTH2ChRQZGN; altered to secte another hand X; secte PEVAF; assent W.” The B-text has “sute” in all manuscripts.

34. For “secte” Russell and Kane report: “secte] sexte corrected H2; sette YCh; sute W.” For the B-text, Kane and Donaldson record only one variant: “secte] sewte is F.”

35. The key to generating such diffusion appears to lie in pronouns that surface without a direct antecedent. This process is similar to the way linguistic dilations take on a certain agency and then resubsume themselves in the text; see below, pp. 80–84 and especially 117–23.

36. E.g., Mann, “Power of the Alphabet,” 44; Baird, “*Secte and Suit Again*,” 117–19; and Russell and Kane (see n. 34, above). But see Schmidt, ed., *Piers Plowman: A Parallel-Text Edition*, 2:542 (hereafter “Schmidt”).

37. “Oh happy fault, oh necessary sin of Adam.”

38. John 14:10–11: “I am in the Father, and the Father in me”; John 14:9: “he that seeth me seeth the Father also.”

39. Gen. 1:26: “Let us make man to our image and likeness.”

40. 1 John 4:16: “he that abideth in charity, abideth in God, and God in him.”

41. Eph. 4:8, quoting Ps. 67:19: “[Ascending on high], he led captivity captive.”

42. Matt. 9:13: “I am not come to call the just, but sinners [to repentance].”

43. My thanks to Carl Schmidt for discussing this line with me.

44. See also the entries for “secte” (140–41) and “sute” (150) in Alford, *Piers Plowman: A Glossary of Legal Diction*. Recall, too, that “secte” is importantly implicated in Langland’s use of “figuratively” (see p. 29, above).

45. On “love deed,” see pp. 86–91, below.

46. For the Pauline body, see pp. 6–7, above. For indwelling in 1 John, see p. 219, n. 3, and p. 233, n. 40.

47. Unlike *Piers Plowman*, Julian’s *A Revelation* (Long Text) survives in only two complete manuscripts, neither from the Middle Ages. Her earlier work, *A Vision* (Short Text), is extant in only one manuscript, which is medieval; where *A Vision* and *A Revelation* coincide, *A Vision* can provide valuable clues to the text. Both full manuscripts of *A Revelation* are seventeenth-century copies: British Library MS Sloane 2499 (Sloane) and Paris Bibliothèque Nationale MS Fonds Anglais 40 (Paris). An excerpted version is in the fifteenth-century Westminster Cathedral Treasury MS 4 (Westminster). On the textual tradition and for descriptions of these manuscripts, see Watson and Jenkins, 10–12, 24–49; Glasscoe, “Visions and Revisions”; Colledge and Walsh, 1:1–33.

48. Glasscoe, 5.6–10, p. 5 (underlining and braces mine).

49. Colledge and Walsh, 5.3–8, p. 299 (underlining mine).

50. Watson, Jenkins, and Kempster, in Watson and Jenkins, 419 (underlining mine).

51. Amy Appleford has linked the phrase “wrappeth vs and wyndeth vs” with medieval death culture by noting that Julian’s language here is quite similar to language from the *Ordo ad visitandum infirmum* and *Visitation of the Sick*, wherein being wrapped in a cloth implies enclosure in a burial shroud; in Julian’s usage, she notes, the language further suggests swaddling clothes. Appleford, “The ‘Comene Course of Prayers,’” 203–4.

52. See, further, Chapter 1, pp. 47–50.

53. Compare Charles d’Orléans’s transformation of the noun, *shirt*, into a verb, *shirten*, to express his emotional state by an intimate comparison with his own skin (*The English Poems*, 17):

Madame a trouthe not ~~viotrythli knowe say~~ what

Nor bi what ende that y shulde first bigynne

The wofulle lijf vnto yow to biwray

Which shertith me more nerre than doth my skyn (ballade 10, ll. 491–94)

by

life

shirts; near

54. E.g.: “And our substance is our fader, God almyty, and our substance is our moder, God al wisdamm, and our substance is in our lord the Holy Gost, God al goodnes; for our substance is hole [*whole*] in ilke [each] person of the Trinite, which is on [one] God. And our sensualite is only in the second person, Crist Iesus, in whom is the Fader and the Holy Gost . . .” (58.61–66).

55. By comparison, when the Cloud-author and Hilton take up the theological possibilities of skin-as-cloth, they have a different end in mind. In his *Book of Prive Counseling*, for instance, the Cloud-author also describes being clothed in divine embrace, in this case as a desirable outcome of the work of contemplation:

For þof al I bid þee in þe biginnyng, bicause of þi boistouste [*earthy nature*] & þi goostly rudenes [*spiritual lack of skill*], lappe [*swaddle*] & cloþe þe felyng of þi God in þe felyng of þiself, 3it schalt þou after whan þou arte maad by contynowaunce [*perseverance*] more slei3 [*adept*] in clennes of spirit, nakyn, spoyle [*strip*] & vtterly vncloþe þiself of al maner of felyng of þiself, þat þou be able to be clopid wiþ þe gracyous felyng of God self.

& þis is þe trewe condicion of a parfite loue, only & vtterly to spoyle hymself of hymself for þat þing þat he louiþ, & not admit ne suffre to be cloped bot only in þat þing þat he louiþ, & þat not only for a tyme, bot eendlesly to be vmbilappid þerin, in ful & fynal for3etyng of hymself. Þis is þe werk of loue þat none may knowe bot he þat felip it. (*The Cloud of Unknowing*, ed. Hodgson, 89, ll. 8–19)

Whereas Julian emphasizes permanence, with no evident beginning or ending to the divine embrace, the Cloud-author describes a progression in the perfection of the soul, a two-layered “felyng of þi God” and “felyng of þiself,” the latter of which must be stripped away before the former can be put on. Hilton, too, draws on the Pauline texts that require Christians to “[strip] yourselves of the old man with his deeds, / And [put] on the new, him who is renewed unto knowledge, according to the image of him that created him” (Col. 3:9–10; Rom. 13:14: “put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ”):

And clothe yow in a newe man, that is schapen aftir God in rightwisenesse, holinesse, and soothfastnesse. . . . Thus seith Seynt Poul: *Exspoliantes veterem hominem cum actibus suis; induite novum, qui renovatur in agnitione dei, secundum imaginem eius qui creavit eum* (Col. 3:9–10). Spoile yourself of the oolde man with alle his deedis; that is, casteth fro yow the love of the world with alle wordli maneris. And clothe you in a newe man; that is, ye schullen be renewed in the knowynge of God aftir the liknesse of hym that made yow. (2.31.2131–40)

While Julian also connects knowledge of one’s soul with knowledge of God, her lack of emphasis on stages of knowing, or progression, is characteristic of her positive approach to a God who “er that he mad us he lovid us” (53.37–38). She reverses the Cloud-author’s priorities, making God the means of knowing the soul: “God is nerer to us than our owen soule; for he is ground in whom our soule stondith and he is mene that kepith the substance

and the sensualite to God [P and W: together] so that thai shall never departyn; for our soule sittith in God in very rest and our soule stonndith in God in very strength and our soule is kindly rotid in God in endles love. And therfore if we wil have knowlidge of our soule and comenyng and daliance therwith, it behovith to sekyn into our lord God in whom it is inclosid" (56.14–21). See also Baker, *Julian of Norwich's Showings*, 109.

56. *Liber sententiarum ac dictorum memorabilium*, PL 210:233c–234b; translation mine.

57. See also 23.48–49: "he browte us up into hevyn and made us for to be his corone and endles blisse."

58. The "medlur" of Christ's transformed human flesh is additionally linked to humanity by its association with the Creation, when God "tooke the slyppe of erth, which is a matter medlid and gaderid of all bodily things, and therof he made mannys bodye" (53.45–46). In chapter sixty, Julian further describes Christ's incarnate body as a garment suitable for the work of mothering:

for he wold al holy become our moder in althyng, he toke the ground of his werke full low and ful myldely in the maydens womb. . . . in this low place he raysid him and dyte [dressed] him ful redy in our pore flesh, himselfe to don the service and the office of moderhede in althyng. The moders service is nerest, redyest and sekirest, for it is most of trueth. This office ne myte, ne couthe, ne never non don to the full but he alone. (60.10–20)

Her implication is that Christ's mothering could only be done in the flesh, in mother's clothes.

59. "[T]he langor and desire" recalls the imagery from the Song of Songs I examined in considering the Truelove tradition: *quia amore languet* [because I languish for love] (Cant. 2:5, 5:8).

60. He reigns in the passage 81.13–14. For the theological background to the soul as city, see Riehle, *Middle English Mystics*, 131–32.

61. For kingship, see, e.g., 7.36; 14.23; 20.9; 21.34; 50.40. The theme of kingship holds an important place in the Advent liturgy. During the Advent season, the Church expectantly awaits the coming of the savior (this season being analogous to Mary's pregnancy). On kingship in some thirteenth-century sermons for Advent, see O'Carroll, *A Thirteenth-Century Preacher's Handbook*, 261–71; J. Leclercq, *L'Idée de la royauté du Christ*.

62. Cf. Skeat: "*Metropolitanus* was formerly commonly used as synonymous with *archiepiscopus* It here seems to mean 'chief bishop of all the world'; Jerusalem being the original Christian metropolis." *The Vision of William Concerning Piers the Plowman in Three Parallel Texts together with Richard the Redeless*, 2:233, note to C.18.267 (in Russell and Kane, this is C.17.267). The passage occurs in the B-text (15.516) only in witnesses R and F.

63. As Haimo of Auxerre explains ("In *Zachariam Prophetam*," in *Enarratio in Duodecim Prophetas Minores*, PL 117:230a–d, translation mine; Migne incorrectly attributes this work to Haymo of Halberstadt):

By mitre, that is, the diadem of a priest, is understood the dignity of the priesthood, i.e., that with the filth of sins removed he should be granted a pure priesthood. Mystically Jesus is that high priest to whom it is said, "You are a priest forever" (Psal. 109.4). . . . He who stands before the angel of the Lord is himself mediator between God and men, God and man Christ. . . . In Christ are the different substances [*diversae substantiae*] God and man in one person. He was dressed in soiled garments, because he carried our sins. . . . These soiled garments were removed from him, when he blotted out our sins. . . . The clean mitre on his head signifies the splendor of his divine majesty. "The head of Christ in fact is God" (I Cor. 11.3). He himself therefore is God, he himself is also man; and by the clothes is understood humanity, by the mitre the brightness of divine majesty. . . . Christ and the Church are head and members.

64. Isidore of Seville, *De Ecclesiasticis Officiis* (2.4), 55–56, translation mine.

65. This connection was also a common one, e.g., Clement of Alexandria: "The crown the Lord wore is a figure of ourselves who were once barren, but now encircle him as a garland through His Church, of which He is the head." *Christ the Educator*, 2.8.73, 156. See also H. Leclercq, "Tonsure"; Trichet, *La Tonsure*, 150–53.

66. In her chapter seventeen, with its well-known passage noting her concern that the skin

on the very top of Christ's head, above the crown of thorns, would sag so much from its weight that it could fall off painfully, she describes Christ as "hangyng up in the eyr [air] as men hang a cloth to drye" (17.38–39). In chapter twenty-eight she understands that "Gods servants, holy church, shal be shakyn in sorows and anguis [*anguish*] and tribulation in this world as men shakyn a cloth in the wynde" (28.8–10). Both images depend for their effect in part on our knowledge of the flexibility and weight of cloth: that when cloth is wet and sags the fibers pull against each other but do not release, and that a strong wind snaps a cloth viciously because of the cloth's structural integrity. Once again, she uses the same concrete prompt (cloth) for an individual (Christ) and a collective (Christ's body, the Church).

67. Margaret Ann Palliser calls "we be his corone" one of Julian's "most original insights." She does not, however, note the symmetry of "we be his corone" and "he is our clotheing," confining her remarks to the "theology of oneing" only. Palliser, *Christ, Our Mother*, 138.

68. While I note that Jill Mann uses "linguistic dilation" fleetingly in *Langland and Allegory* in discussing the same rhetorical phenomenon I describe here, she does not mean the technical sense I have described, and she does not take up the term for systematic use. See further n. 72, below.

69. Here "made sensual" seems to mean "begin to perceive by means of sensation," directly linking "sensuality" with a physical body.

70. As Colledge and Walsh point out (2:525, n. to l. 139): "the personification here may reflect some of the literature dealing with the debate of the 'Four Daughters of God.'"

71. In this particular instance, Julian may have in mind God's immanence rather than the more mundanely human action of dwelling, or the less particularized action of remaining.

72. Jill Mann discusses other critics' theorizing about this phenomenon in *Langland and Allegory* (14–15; 26, n. 16):

Richard Glasser similarly distinguishes what he calls the "abstractum agens" in such phrases as "fear gripped me," "grief overcame me," "folly led me astray" from allegory proper; it is not until such abstractions become the actors in an autonomously developing narrative that we can speak of allegory. But the strength of Langland's allegory is precisely that he realises the allegorical potential of these simple linguistic formulae. His writing is full of "abstracta agentia" which can at any moment turn into large-scale personifications, stepping forward to take a role in the allegorical drama.

Marc-René Jung notes a similar (though less vividly realised) "flottement général entre l'abstractum agens, la personnification et l'adjectif nominal" in the *Miserere* of the Reclus de Moilliens (*Etudes sur le poème allégorique en France au moyen âge* (Bern, 1971), 265. Lavinia Griffiths uses Inge Crosman's term "brief conceits" for these short-term transformations of *abstracta agentia* into personifications. (*Personification*, 12)

73. E.g., keeping: "and to this our lord answerid: 'I kepe the ful sekirly'" (37.10–11), "in which endless love we be led and kept of God and never shall be lost" (53.52–53), "for he made us and kepith us in him" (54.23); drawing: "in this stondyth the poynt of the gostly thrist, which is lestyng in hym as long as we be in nede, us drawing up to his blis" (31.50–52), "we folowen hym and he drawith us into hym be love" (43.38), "he is with us in hevyn, very man in his owne person us updrawand" (52.39); working: "for his werkynge is privy, and he wil be perceivid" (10.97–98), "he toke the ground of his werke full low and ful myldely in the maydens womb" (60.11–12), "for he in al this werkynge usith the office of a kinde nurse" (61.71–72). Morton Bloomfield similarly locates the personifying force for count-nouns in the governing verb ("Personification-Metaphors").

74. For the theory underlying "literal-first," see pp. 34–36, above.

75. Clark and Gerrig, "Understanding Old Words," 592.

76. Ibid. Even the *OED* does not offer these culinary senses alongside its definition of the crustacean itself. To these examples, I would add two from personal experience. When I was traveling by train from Albany to Erie, Pennsylvania, the conductors were announcing which cars passengers bound for specific destinations should choose, because some cars were being uncoupled partway along. Most passengers were going to larger cities (Cleveland, Buffalo, Rochester); no one mentioned Erie. When I asked the conductor which car I should use, she shouted down the line to the head conductor, "Where are we putting the E-ries?," an example of sense creation all three of us immediately understood [passengers bound for Erie], although her intonation and the similar sound of another word (*erie*) made poor passenger

me, when described this way, sound particularly undesirable. In another case, my sister found that the phone system at work kept hanging up instead of allowing her to leave messages for colleagues. The problem, tech support told her, was the pitch of her voice: “You’re a zero,” they said [someone whose voice sounds like the digital tone indicating zero]. In another context, she might have thought they were rudely calling her a loser [someone worth only zero] or a failure [a student who scored a zero, opposed, for instance, to a “ninety” or an “eighty-eight”].

77. Ibid.

78. “Your interpretation is built entirely around elements from your knowledge of Napoleon’s life. These elements are not part of the designation of Napoleon, regardless which theory of proper names one accepts. You are dealing with elements in your biography of Napoleon, not entries in your mental lexicon. The process is one of sense creation without sense selection” (ibid.).

79. As Clark and Gerrig note, the fact that Napoleon was not posing for a photograph but rather in a painting does not impede participants’ ready association of his pose in the painting with a pose for the camera.

Chapter 3. Agency: When Christ as “Doer” Is Also the “Love Deed”

1. Watson, “Conceptions of the Word,” 101.

2. Current critical nomenclature for the Charters tradition is misleading. Because scholars speak of the “Long Charter of Christ” and the “Short Charter of Christ,” the “Charter of Christ” sounds like a single poem, revised over time, in short and long versions. In fact, the Charters exist in six forms, one with three successive sub-forms; in three languages (Latin, English, and Irish); in prose and in verse; and are attested in at least seventy-four manuscripts. Manuscript contexts vary widely, from theological to historical, medicinal, diplomatic, devotional, or literary, and some witnesses incorporate Latin mottoes, visual elements, or music. Though all are commonly referred to as “the Charter of Christ,” each is a distinct literary work: the so-called “Short Charter” is not an abridged “Long Charter,” nor are the long and short Latin versions translations of the English or vice versa.

The corpus of the Charters tradition was defined by Spalding, whose *Middle English Charters of Christ* remains the standard text. English language witnesses, including those unknown to Spalding, are listed in Boffey and Edwards, *A New Index of Middle English Verse* within index numbers 4184 (“Short Charter”), 1828 (“Kent Charter”), 1718 (“Long Charter,” A-text), 4154 (“Long Charter,” B-text), and 1174 (“Long Charter,” C-text). Boffey and Edwards include witnesses not previously listed for index numbers 4184 and 4154 in Brown and Robbins, *The Index of Middle English Verse* and Robbins and Cutler, *Supplement to the Index of Middle English Verse*. However, they also replicate an error from *IMEV* and its *Supplement*, whereby the “Short Charter” entry correctly lists BL Stowe 620 but incorrectly additionally lists it as BL Sloane 620. Laura Ashe notes that *IMEV* incorrectly indicates that Cambridge University Library Add. 6686 contains both the “Long Charter” and the “Short Charter”; she argues that the text is “a two-part continuation of the ‘Short Charter’ (previously identified as separate poems, *IMEV* 3745 and 1740), making up a poem of ninety-six lines divided into three parts by Latin headings.” Ashe argues that this poem, attested only in this manuscript, is worth considering in its own right (this version was unknown to Spalding). Ashe, “The ‘Short Charter of Christ,’” 37.

Spalding notes one Irish translation of the “Long Charter” B-text; two unknown to her are Dublin, King’s Inns 10, fol. 26r–28r, and Dublin, Royal Irish Academy 3 B 22, pp. 33–38; see Mac Niocaill, “Carta Humani Generis” and Breeze, “The Charter of Christ in Medieval English, Welsh and Irish”; Mac Niocaill includes an edition of the Irish text and its English exemplar, BL Harl. 2382. Julian Luxford notes a sculpted figure of Christ (c. 1500–1520) he believes to be “Christ as the Man of Sorrows, holding the Charter of Human Redemption,” making his identification on the basis that “there is no other context available for a standing figure of Christ holding a sealed document”: “More on the Sculptural Iconography of the West Front of Bath Abbey,” 303, fig. 2; 307. Emily Steiner’s careful and illuminating discussion of the Charters is the most extensive to date: *Documentary Culture and the Making of Medieval English Literature*, esp. 193–228. See also Ashe, “The ‘Short Charter’”; Keen, *The Charters of Christ and Piers Plowman*; Green, *A Crisis of Truth*, 261–63, 276–77; Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 306–8.

3. The B- and C-texts differ from the earlier A-text chiefly by accretions of doctrinal or

devotional material, particularly regarding the Eucharist and the Marian *placatus*. They also demonstrate an increasing degeneration of the twinned lordship metaphors, as the legal and theological underpinnings are less carefully worded or drop away.

4. The Short Charters lack the narrative framework telling about Christ's life.

5. While the grant is the same in all versions of the Charters of Christ, the required rent differs; in the A-text (and elsewhere) it is framed in terms of penance, while in other cases Christ asks for love of neighbor and self, etc.

6. Such affective appeal is particularly strong in writings derived from the Franciscan *Meditationes Vitae Christi*, e.g.: "oure blessed fadir of heuene spared not his owen sone but suffrede hym to be streyned on the harde cros, moore dispitously & greuously þan euer was schepys skyn streyned on the wall or vp-on þe parchemyn-makeris harowe aþens þ sonne to drye," *Meditation of the Five Wounds of Christ*, in Horstman, ed., *Yorkshire Writers*, 2:440; "he was thus sprede o-brode one þe crosse more straite þan any parchemyne-skyne es sprede one þe harowe," *The Privy of the Passion* [ME version of chapters 74–92 of the *Meditationes Vitae Christi*; however, the parchment reference is not in the Latin original (Spalding, xlvi)], in *Yorkshire Writers*, 1:206; "þi bodi is streyned as a parchemyn-skyn upon þe harowe," Richard Rolle, "Meditations on the Passion (2)," in *Yorkshire Writers* 1:100; "Mawdleyne—'Cum hithere, Ioseph, beholde & looke, / How many bludy letters beyn writen in þis buke, / Small margente her is.' Iosephe—'Ye, this parchement is strichit owt of syse. / O derest lorde! in how paynfull wise / Haue ye tholit this!'," "Christ's Burial," in Furnivall, ed., *The Digby Plays*, ll. 271–76, also printed in Baker, Murphy, and Hall, eds., *The Late Medieval Religious Plays*, 149.

7. Stephen Nichols explains this doubled quality of the active sufferance of Christ's passion particularly well in his discussion of the late tenth-century Clermont-Ferrand *La Passion du Christ*, a macaronic Franco-Provençal passion poem:

"*Pax vobis sit*," dis a trestoz;
"eu soi Jhesus qui *passus* soi:
vedez mas mans, vedez mos peds,
vedez mo laz, qu'i fui plagaz."

"Peace be with you," he said to all, "I am Jesus who suffered: look at my hands, look at my feet, look at my side which was wounded."

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Passus supplies the key to understanding the concept of cruciform language as text production. From *pator*, "to suffer, endure," *passus* also bears the connotation of "consent" or "acquiescence" or "to be in a state of mind." In short, *passus* connotes intentionality in the act of suffering, voluntary commitment to this state. . . . But *passus* was also an adjective formed from the past participle of *pando*, *pandere*, with the sense "stretch out, reveal, lay open," and having the complementary meaning, "spread out to dry." For a culture in which writing was done on skin that had been stretched out to dry, to which marks would then be added to reveal truth, the aptness of Christ's metaphor would have been immediately apparent. The text has him say, in effect, that he acquiesced in the suffering which caused his skin to be stretched out on the cross to reveal him as the Messiah—just as he had predicted in the Conversation with Nicodemus—thereby signing himself as a text written in the flesh in which the Passion could be read and reread. (Nichols, *Romanesque Signs*, 121–22)

The Clermont-Ferrand Passion is printed by Gaston Paris as "La Passion du Christ"; this stanza (109) occurs on 312.

Julian of Norwich similarly makes use of the painful image of stretching and drying human skin when she moves from the image of cloth drying in the open air ("[he was] hanging up in the eyr as men hang a cloth to drye," 17.38–39) and Christ's word from the cross, "*sitio*," "I thirst" (John 19:28):

Blodeleshede and peyne dryden within and blowyng of wynde and cold commyng fro withouten metten togeder in the swete body of Criste. And these iiii, tweyn withouten, and tweyn within, dryden the fleshe of Criste be process of tyme. And thow this peyne was bitter and sharpe, it was full longe lestyng, as to my sighte, and peynfully dreyden up all the lively spirits of Crists fleshe. Thus I saw the swete fleshe dey, in semyng be party after

party, dryande with marvelous peynys. And as longe as any spirit had life in Crists fleshe, so longe sufferid he peyne. This longe pynnyng semyd to me as if he had bene seven night ded, deyand, at the poynt of out passing away, sufferand the last peyne. . . . And methowte the deyeng of Crists flesh was the most peyne, and the last, of his passion. . . . And in this deyng [Paris: drying] was browte to my mynde the words of Criste: “I threst”; for I saw in Criste a doble threst: one bodely, another gostly . . . (A *Revelation*, 16.18–17.6)

The horror of what Julian sees turns, in her mind, to a hopeful comprehension: she associates the drying of the flesh (a bodily thirst) with Christ’s longing to save humanity (a spiritual thirst); the two coexist in one person, and the promise of the second mitigates the pain of the first. Christ’s thirst, as she sees it, is an active desire enabled by the passivity of sufferance. In the “Long Charter,” “I thirst” becomes a request for “a loue drynk” (167), imagistically and conceptually complementary to Julian’s use of *sitio*.

8. The plot action indicates that “And streyte y-streyned vpon þe rod” (78) means, strictly speaking, “and pulled taut, flattened, upon the cross” (*MED*, s.v. “streinen” [v.1, 2c]: “to stretch (Christ on the cross); stretch (Christ’s body) on the cross”). The verb *streinen*, however, can also carry the sense of “to seize (property) in order to enforce an obligation,” something close to our modern *distrain* but in a particularized sense pertaining to land tenure (*MED*, s.v. “streinen” [v.2, 2b–c]).

9. MS: “was.”

10. Lam. 1:12: “O all ye that pass by the way, attend, [and see if there be any sorrow like to my sorrow: for he hath made a vintage of me, as the Lord spoke in the day of his fierce anger].” On the use of this verse in the tradition of the “complaint of Christ” and the liturgy of Holy Week, see Gray, *Themes and Images*, 141; Woolf, *The English Religious Lyric*, 36. On this line in the context of the “Long Charter,” see Chapter 4, p. 151.

11. Or, “in order to show all of you my love deed” (or, perhaps, both).

12. The spelling in BL Add. 11307 connects this “rede” with the “rede” of two lines back, the color of Christ’s bloody wounds, although the rhyme scheme makes it clear that in line 92 “rede” must be the infinitive of *reden* (“to read”), not the color red: “rede” must rhyme with “dede” [in Present Day English, “deed”]. Note for comparison “rad,” not “rede,” in lines 227 and 228: “Sore may þeyr ben a drad / Whan þis chartre shal ben rad.” It is entirely possible, of course, that the scribe of BL Add. 11307 mistakenly copied “rede” from line 90 when he came to line 92, adjusting the verb to match.

13. “Four leued gras” is another name for the plant, the true-love. I discussed this part of the charter in Chapter 2, pp. 62–64, q.v.

14. Ps. 21:15: “My heart is become like wax melting [in the midst of my bowels].”

15. A. V. C. Schmidt has written compellingly about Langland’s imagery of Christ’s “herte-blod” that connects B.1.164–65 with B.15.515–17 and B.18.85–86, well worth thinking about alongside the “*cor meum*” in the “Long Charter”: “The Sacramental Significance of Blood in *Piers Plowman*,” 218–20.

16. For this technique with regard to “O vos omnes,” see pp. 151–52, below.

17. Cf. *Piers Plowman* B.14.186–95 (not in C).

18. The “Long Charter” poet’s incorporation of the sacrament of the Eucharist into his charter metaphor is worth considering alongside Walter Hilton’s analogy likening the sacrament of penance to the security a charter gives one who has committed an offense against the king:

For yif a man had forfeted his lif agens a kyng of this erthe, it were not inow to hym as ful sikernesse [*security*] for to have oonli forgyvenesse of the kyng, but yif he have a chartre, the whiche mai be his tokene and his warant agens alle othere men. Right so mai it be seid goostli, yif a man have forfeted agens the kyng of hevene his lif thorough deedli synne, it is not ynow to hym to ful sikirnesse for to have forgyvenesse of God oonli bi contricion atwix God and hym, but yif he have a chartre maad bi Holi Chirche, yif he may come therto. And that is the sacrament of penaunce, the whiche is his chartre and his tokene of forgevenesse. For sith [*since*] he forfeteth bothe agens God and Holi Chirche, it is skilful [*reasonable*] that he have forgevenesse for that oon and a warant for that othir. And this is a skile [*reason*] whi that confession is nedeful. (*Scale*, 2.7.276–85)

On the “Long Charter” poet’s interest in original sin as treason—an offense against the king—

see p. 270, n. 13, below.

19. Spalding, xciv.

20. Hughes, “‘The Feffement That Fals Hath Ymaked’,” 132, n. 24.

21. Phillips, “*The Quatrefoil of Love*” 257.

22. Another verse charter not embedded in a larger work is attributed to King Æthelstan; it exists in two forms, IMEV 3300 (to St. John of Beverley; “Rimed Charter Called Æthelstán’s”) and IMEV 4183 (to the Abbey of Ripon; “King Athelstan’s Charter”).

23. The poem is engraved on twelve enameled copper plates tacked to the eastern tower of the outer gatehouse. An additional copper plate reproduces the Cobham seal displayed as if affixed to the “legal document” (the poem) by a striped cord. John, third lord Cobham, had the castle crenellated in 1381; it is situated in Kent. The poem was probably commissioned after the rising in June of that year, most likely between the September resurgence in Kent and the completion of the castle’s outer gatehouse in September 1382. For historical circumstances surrounding this poem’s singular presentation, its probable connection with the rising of 1381, and conclusions to be drawn from its unusual presentation, see Cervone, “John de Cobham and Cooling Castle’s Charter Poem.” The poem appears to represent one influential member of the elite’s response to the rising, a response that indicates he thought the rebels were capable of a sophisticated sort of reading. It might be the only surviving record contemporary to the rebellion that represents an elite assessment of the rebels’ reading ability.

24. Except where otherwise noted, I quote the “Short Charter” from BL Add. 37049 as printed by Spalding.

25. I approach these questions by way of the linguistic concept of deixis, the aspect of language that delineates a relationship between the speaking subject and a given word. Such relationships are defined along one of three axes: subjectivity, time, and space. These axes intersect at the *origo*, or the speaking subject itself; a deictic marker, or word encoding a deictic relationship, points out some distance from or closeness to the *origo*. The closest (proximal) relationships are expressed in the words I (proximal subjectivity), here (proximal space), and now (proximal time). More distant (distal) relationships include you (distal subjectivity), there (distal space), and then (distal time). Mary Galbraith gives a particularly helpful summary of deictic theory in “Deictic Shift Theory and the Poetics of Involvement in Narrative.”

26. For the full argument, see Cervone, “Cooling Castle’s Charter Poem,” esp. 913–16.

27. In a nonpoetical charter, the “I” of the document is the donor of the gift and the charter itself is written to stand in for the donor at a future time and place when the terms under which the gift was made may be challenged. As Bracton explains in his authoritative thirteenth-century legal compendium:

A gift in writing is made in these words, “Know all men, present and future, that I, such a one, have given, granted, and by this my present charter confirmed to such a one, for his homage and service, so much land with the appurtenances in such a vill etc.” as below. By saying, “I, such a one,” he indicates the donor and names him specifically in the gift. When he says, “I have given” he makes clear his intention that the thing given be made the property of the donee. . . . By saying “by my present charter I have confirmed,” he intimates that his will, by which the thing is transferred to the donee and which must be firm, be confirmed by the present charter authenticated by his seal, for to confirm is but to reaffirm what before was firm. (*Bracton on the Laws and Customs of England*, 2:111)

28. While some theorists would disagree with the idea that writing presumes an author, for our purposes we may at least perhaps agree that writing postulates a scribe. With today’s technology, we might be quick to anticipate the possibility that a monkey playing with a computer will eventually produce or reproduce a *Hamlet*. In the Middle Ages, when all writing was directly produced by hand through laborious effort over time, readers, many of them also writers, must have been even more keenly aware of a hand and mind behind each word on a page.

29. See also Steiner, “Medieval Documentary Poetics and Langland’s Authorial Identity,” 94–95:

Letters and documents were perhaps thought to represent their makers more convincingly

than other texts because they were written in the first person singular or plural and seemed to impersonate the voice (and, by extension, the authority and even physical presence) of the author or actor (e.g., “Henry by the grace of God King of England sends greeting to the archbishops, bishops, etc.”). This effect is heightened by the transhistorical fiction of most legal documents in which the historical speaker continually exhorts present and future readers by means of the ever-present charter (e.g., “I have given, and conceded, and with this present charter confirmed . . .”). . . . Yet legal documents are even more intimately connected to their makers than letters because they are necessarily autobiographical.

30. Spearing, “Prison, Writing, Absence,” 91–92; Camargo, *The Middle English Verse Love Epistle*, 53–65. Most medieval letters were written with the expectation that they would be read not only by the person to whom they were addressed but also by others. Even some modern letters are written with an eye toward a wider audience, perhaps even an audience that would include the yet unborn, and with self-conscious awareness of their legacy to posterity, such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail”; such letters may approach self-reflexivity even without directly acknowledging their textual situation. Medieval letters patent, which were circulated unsealed, retain this quality, as do proclamations, legal acts, and even prologues to written texts. On the distinction between letters close (sealed) and letters patent (open), see Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, 90–91. In the Middle Ages, the two testaments of the Bible were allegorized as letters close (Old Testament) and letters patent (New Testament) or the Old and the New Covenant. Both *Ancrene Wisse* and *Piers Plowman* make effective allegorical use of letters patent as a vehicle for salvation. On the link between letters close and patent in *Ancrene Wisse* and *Piers Plowman*, see Steiner, *Documentary Culture*, 115–18, 158–63.

31. In BL Harley 116, for instance, the line corresponding to BL Add. 37049’s “My awne seal þerto I hyнге” reads “Myselfe þerto forsoth j hyнге [*truly I hang!*]” (Spalding, 9). With the versions side by side, the line of thought that might have led to the Harley 116 reading seems evident. Even without the benefit of such a comparison, an observant reader could still work out that, according to Harley 116, Christ’s body hangs on the Cross just as a pendant seal hangs on a charter; the seal, however, is not actually mentioned in this manuscript until the following lines: “And for the more sikernesse / My herte wounded the sele it is.” The “Short Charter” does not explicitly equate Christ’s pendant body with a seal; in fact, the image of wounded heart as seal would seem to preclude such an identification, the seal being metonymically confined in this case to a specific body part rather than applied to the body as a whole.

32. The parts of a charter and their purposes are helpfully enumerated in *Fleta*, a compendium and explanation of English common law written around 1290, which follows Bracton on this issue but in a simplified form. According to *Fleta*, notification of intent marks the beginning of a charter: “Gifts are made by these words: ‘Know all men present and to come that I, so-and-so, have given and granted [*Sciant presentes et futuri quod ego talis dedi et concessi*] and by this my present charter have confirmed to so-and-so for his homage and service such-and-such an amount of land with appurtenances in N.” This is followed by a clause that can specify conditions of the gift, “To have and to hold [*Habendam et tenendam*].” Next the rent clause tells what the recipient must do for the charter to remain valid: “rendering therefore annually so much at such-and-such terms [*reddendo inde annuatim tantum ad tales terminos*].” The warrant clause, “and I and my heirs will warrant to so-and-so and his heirs [*et ego et heredes mei warrantabimus tali et heredibus suis*],” details the responsibilities of the donor. Finally, in testimony and proof of his act the donor will affix a sign by adding this clause or something similar: “In witness whereof I have affixed my seal to this writing [*In cuius rei testimonium huic scripto sigillum meum apposui*]. And to this witnesses ought to be summoned . . .” (*Fleta*, 3:28–31). The chapter concludes with warnings about the proper use of seals and their authentication.

Except in the case of a few witnesses that begin with a scribal couplet or two by way of explanation or admonish the reader to listen, the “Short Charter” adds nothing at all to the charter format; the spareness of its form focuses attention on the content. Christ announces to all souls, present and future (“*Nouerint presentes & futuri*”) that he died on the Cross, then gives and grants (“*Dedi et Concessi*”) to all repentant souls eternal bliss as long as (“*Habendum*”) he is king of heaven, keeping for himself (“*Redendo*”) the rent of true love of

God and neighbor. If anyone does not believe he died for humanity, he will do it again (“*Warrantizatio*”). He sets his seal (“*In cuius rei testimonium*”), dates the charter (“*Datum apud Hierusalem*”), and gives his witnesses (“*Hij testibus*”). This, in summary, is the “Short Charter,” which adheres to charter format both by its overall form and by its Latin tags that explicitly outline that form in those witnesses that retain the Latin.

The text of the Short Charter cited above is that of BL Sloane 3292, printed by Spalding (4). This manuscript has the fullest delineation of clauses by their Latin equivalents and is the only witness she prints that identifies the rent clause with the Latin rubric of *Redendo*, although all witnesses do include a rent clause. The brief emblematic verse at the top (not cited here) varies or is omitted in other manuscripts. Hubert Hall notes that by the end of the thirteenth century, “*noueritis*” frequently replaced “*sciatis*” (*Studies in English Official Historical Documents*, 239). Other manuscripts of the Short Charter use “*sciatis*” as in *Fleta* or write out the phrase in English (Spalding 5–16).

33. On the complex issue of what “in help of the cuntre” might mean, see Cervone, “Cooling Castle’s Charter Poem,” 891–93, 897, 910–13.

34. *Ibid.*, esp. 915–16.

35. A similarly ironic acknowledgment of Christ’s nature and power may be found in the York Crucifixion play, where the workmen raising the cross attest to more than they appear to realize.

36. Spalding, xxxix–xl.

37. For the Truelove tradition, see Chapter 2.

38. For the imagination’s role in thought, according to medieval theories of cognition, see p. 215, n. 2 above.

39. Luke 2:15: “the shepherds said to one another: [Let us go over to Bethlehem, and let us see this word that is come to pass, which the Lord hath shewed to us].”

40. Matt. 2:1: “there came wise men from the east [to Jerusalem].”

41. For further discussion in the context of other passages, see this chapter’s section on linguistic dilation in Langland’s writing, pp. 117–23 below. On the verbal quality, see p. 255, n. 99.

42. Spearing, *Readings in Medieval Poetry*, 229.

43. As Kaske has demonstrated (“*Gigas the Giant in Piers Plowman*”), Langland made use of this same verse for B.18.252. In C it occurs at 20.261–63:

For iesus as a geaunt with a gyn cometh 3ende
To breke and to bete adoun all þat ben agaynes hym
And to haue out of helle alle þat hym liketh.

44. Others include the leap into the cradle, into the Jordan (Christ’s baptism), into the sepulcher, into hell, back to earth (before the Ascension), and back to earth (Judgment). The most thorough scholarly accounts of the leaps of Christ are by Alejandro Olivar, who includes a useful chart of which leaps occur in the writings of selected early exegetes (“*Los Saltos del Verbo*”), and Cook, ed., *The Christ of Cynewulf*, 143–44. See also, more recently, Marchand, “The Leaps of Christ and *The Dream of the Rood*,” 80–89; Twomey, “Christ’s Leap and Mary’s Clean Catch”; Breeze, “The ‘Leaps’ That Christ Made”; Hill, “Mary, the Rose-Bush”; Haas, “Der Lichtsprung der Gottheit”; Kaske, “Eve’s ‘Leaps’ in the *Ancrene Riwe*.”

45. His original is now lost but the commentary survives in three fragmentary early translations (Georgian, Syriac, and Armenian) and a later Greek paraphrase. For a Latin translation of the Georgian, see Hippolytus, *Interpretatio Cantici Canticorum*. The Syriac is in Pitra, ed., *Analecta Sacra Spicilegio Solesmensi*, 4, 36–41, 306–10. The Greek paraphrase is in Richard, “Une paraphrase grecque résumée du commentaire d’Hippolyte.” For a German translation, see Bonwetsch, *Hippolyts Kommentar zum Hohenlied auf Grund von N. Marrs Ausgabe des Grusinischen Textes*. Olivar further translates Bonwetsch’s German into Spanish (4–5). See also Marchand, 87, n. 11.

46. In fact, his commentary appears to have been unknown to most writers in the Latin West, who relied primarily on Ambrose’s account (derived from Hippolytus) or Gregory the Great’s (derived from Ambrose). Ambrose, *De Isaac et Anima* 4.31, *PL* 14:513b–c, *Expositio Psalmi CXVIII* 6.6, CSEL 62, 111–12; Gregory the Great, *Homiliae in Evangelia* 29.10.226–37, CCSL 141, 253–54. See, for example, Bede, *In Cantica Canticorum* 6.127–35, CCSL 119b, 362; Alcuin, *Compendium in Canticum Canticorum* 2.8, *PL* 100:646d–647a; pseudo-Cassiodorus,

Expositio in Cantica Canticorum 2.8, PL 70:1064a–b; Glossa Ordinaria, *Canticum Canticorum* 2.8.56–57, CCCM 170, 160–61; Honorius Augustodunensis, *Expositio in Cantica Canticorum* 2.9, PL 172:389d, *Sigillum Beatae Mariae ubi Exponuntur Cantica Canticorum* 2, PL 172:502d, “De Ascensione Domini,” *Speculum Ecclesiae*, PL 172:957b–c; Richard of St. Victor, *In Cantica Canticorum Explicatio*, 23, PL 196:475a. On the issue of derivation, see further Olivar, esp. 1–4. It is possible that his commentary might have come to England with Theodore of Tarsus, who was consecrated as archbishop of Canterbury on March 26, 688. For Archbishop Theodore’s life, see Lapidge, “The Career of Archbishop Theodore,” 26–29.

47. Lit., “nephew.”

48. Garitte, *Traité d’Hippolyte*, 41; my translation of Garitte’s Latin version of the Georgian. My thanks to Kevin Hughes for working through this passage and thinking about Hippolytus with me.

49. Some continental writers do as well, e.g., Walter of St. Victor (d. c. 1180), who offers the leaps as seven descents and three ascents:

Vt autem competentius ipsius ascensionem prosequamur, descensionem eius, immo descensiones, plures enim sunt, ad memoriam reuocemus. Prima igitur descensio eius naturae nostrae susceptio fuit, quam notat Apostolus, dicens: *Qui cum informa Dei esset, non rapinam arbitratus est esse se aequalem Deo, sed semetipsum exinaniuit, formam serui accipiens*. Secunda descensio eius fuit nostrae mortalitatis et passibilitatis susceptio, quam consequenter notat idem Apostolus, dicens: *In similitudinem hominum factus*, id est passibilis, mortalis, sicut ceteri hominum; et haec secunda maior prima: maior enim humilitas fuit poenam suscipere quam naturam. Tertia descensio fuit actuum susceptio, quam insinuat Apostolus, subiungens: *Et habitu inuentus ut homo*, id est sic conuersatus inter homines ut uerus homo, quia esuriuit, sitiuit et *fatigatus est ex itinere*, et sedit super puteum; et haec maior prima et secunda. Quarta autem fuit ipsa mors, unde sequitur: *Factus est oboediens usque ad mortem*. Quinta fuit in genere mortis, quod significat Apostolus, supponens: *Mortem autem crucis*. Sexta notatur in eo quod sepultus. Septima et ultima quod *ad inferos descendit*.

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Vnde ex quo fuit perfecte humiliatus, statim ascendere coepit. Primo de inferno ad sepulchrum, deinde de sepulchro in mundum, de mundo in coelum, praebens nobis *exemplum ut sequamur uestigia eius*. (*Sermones ineditos triginta sex*, CCCM 30, 130–31) A brief listing also occurs in William Durandus’s *Rationale divinorum officiorum* (1286), where Durandus describes the actions of a bishop in circling an altar seven times as he consecrates it:

Tertio, per septem circuitus septem uie Christi significantur, prima fuit de celo in uterum, secunda de utero in presepium, tertia de presepio in mundum, quarta de mundo in patibulum, quinta de patibulo in sepulchrum, sexta de sepulchro in limbum, septima de limbo in celum. (*Rationale divinorum officiorum*, 1.7.17.114–48, CCCM 140, 88)

My thanks to Bella Millett for directing my attention to these passages.

50. Ambrose, “Isaac, or the Soul,” trans. McHugh, 28–29. See also his homily on Psalm 118:

“See how he comes,” says the Bride, I have always sought for him, and now he comes; I have for ever prayed that he would come to me and now he does. I want my love to be roused; I think that I have received the wound of love. Now love itself comes running to me. I said: “Come,” and he leaped and bounded. . . . He leaps over lofty places so as to reach the Bride. . . . He leaps over the Church, he bounds over the Synagogue. He leaps over the nations, he bounds over the Jews. Let us see him leap. He leaped from heaven to the Virgin; from her womb to the crib; from the crib to the Jordan; from the Jordan to the cross; from the cross to the tomb and from the tomb to heaven. David, give witness to him, I pray, as he leaps and runs, for you once said: “*He comes exulting like a hero to run his race. He has his rising on the edge of heaven, the end of his course is its furthest edge, and nothing can escape his burning heat.*” (*Homilies of Saint Ambrose on Psalm 118* (119), 73)

For Latin originals of these two texts, see n. 46, above.

51. Number 29 of his *Homiliarum in Evangelia*, cited in n. 46, above.

52. Allen and Calder, *Sources and Analogues of Old English Poetry*, 80.

53. As is well known, the entire second section of *Christ* is based closely on Gregory's sermon; Cynewulf is not merely extracting the Leaps topos.

54. Albert Cook suggests Wis. 18:14–15 as a source, in part because of its suggestion of military conquest (144) but also because of its use in the Divine Office for the third and fourth weeks of Advent.

55. *Christ II*, 28, ll. 720–43; translation mine.

56. The latinate words *form* and *figure* are not available in English until after the Norman Conquest (*forma*, in OE, means “first, earliest,” = L *primus*; it may be seen in the first line here quoted from Cynewulf). In Old English, *hiw* must stand in for both, as well as for *species* and *schema*. *Hiw*, then, encompasses the Present Day English words “Shape, make, form, fashion, species, kind, appearance, symbol, hue, colour, beauty,” embracing a much wider range of meanings than does PDE *hue* (Bosworth and Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, s.v. “forma,” “hiw”). That range includes what we normally term “figurative language,” such as metaphor. The word *hiw* therefore in and of itself calls attention to a broad scope of craftedness, both physical (human form) and linguistic (verbal or poetical form), making the vernacular, in this case, an especially intriguing option for talking about the Incarnation. The conceptual possibilities latent in Cynewulf's vernacularity stand out when the passage is compared with its known Latin source: the closest Gregory comes to mentioning “form” in the context of the leaps of Christ is “*manifestata per carnem Veritas*,” “the Truth, manifested in flesh” (quoted above, p. 109), an expression that does not emphasize the signifying power of language.

57. Ambrose's hymn portrays the extreme height and depth of the leaps in concise, densely packed verse, emphasizing verticality and the disparity between the height of heaven and the depth of hell rather than offering the leaps as a series. The key stanza from *Veni*

~~He proceeds from the Father
he goes into the Father
from the Father he goes
and he comes back to the Father~~
He proceeds from the Father
he goes into the Father
from the Father he goes
and he comes back to the Father

In the stanza preceding this one, a stanza not quoted by the Trinity homilist, Ambrose adapts one of the base texts for the Leaps topos, Ps. 18:6 (*exultavit ut gigas ad currendam viam suam*), to highlight the hypostatic union (“twinning substance”) in a striking visual image that defies visualization:

geminæ gigas substantiam of twinned substance
alacris ut currat viam

eagerly he runs the way

(*Hymnes*, ed. Fontaine, 275; translations mine). Fontaine lists *Veni redemptor gentium* as *Intende qui regis Israel*, with its additional initial verse.

58. Morris, ed., *Old English Homilies of the Twelfth Century*, 111–13; also quoted by Cook, 144.

59. This Donnchadh Mór Dálaigh would appear to be either the famous poet who died in 1244 or a more obscure one of the same name who lived in the fourteenth century, or possibly neither: because bardic poetry follows strict stylistic and metrical forms, it is difficult to settle the attribution definitively. The full poem and an English translation are printed in *Dán Dé*, ed. McKenna, 61–63, 126–27. Breeze reprints McKenna's English translation of the leaps section of the poem only (“The Leaps,” 190–93). Katharine Simms has identified the poem as early thirteenth-century in the Bardic Poetry Database, <http://bardic.celt.dias.ie/main.html>; index number 195. The poem has received virtually no critical attention, though early lines on the creation are briefly mentioned in Salvador Ryan, “Creation and Recreation in Irish Bardic Poetry,” 72. Ryan further argues (“A Slighted Source”) that bardic poetry ought not to be taken too facetiously as being entirely bound formalistically by rigid bardic conventions, particularly in devotional contexts, a view much in sympathy with my own. My thanks to Sim Innes for calling my attention to Ryan's work.

60. I print McKenna's translation except where I indicate in footnotes that his readings diverge from mine. Where I retain his translation, I have also altered his capitalization, changed "thee"/"thy" to "you"/"your," and adjusted archaic past tenses. Although McKenna prints his English translations as a prose paragraph for each verse, for my quotations, I write out each verse as four lines. I follow McKenna's verse numbers, adding "a," "b," "c," or "d" to denote the line within the verse. In his Irish transcription, he records the verses as two lines with puncti to distinguish "a" from "b" and "c" from "d." I am indebted to Hugh Fogarty for discussing bardic poetry and traditions with me, and for his careful comparison of McKenna's translation of the leaps passage with the Irish text. My thanks to Sim Innes, too, for clarification of some important points, and for help with the Irish words in my footnotes.

61. Perhaps a theological comment on the lack of any change of substance in the hypostatic union as a concept difficult for human thought to comprehend ("rough the course"). McKenna: "Thy Generation (from the Father) was a bold speeding."

62. = *altus*: both high and exalted.

63. This difficult line might be commenting specifically on the nature of Christ's heavenly dwelling, anticipating his dwelling within the Virgin in the following line. The word "*cin*" (literally, "portion") may carry a sense here of humanity as family, as "*cuid*" might similarly do in 22b, q.v.; see also note to 20b. McKenna: "joyous its appearance!"

64. McKenna's note: "proverbial expression for 'facing danger,' etc."

65. A word used to denote physical pain; note companion sense in 20d.

66. Indicative of address to an audience (rather than apostrophe to God, as elsewhere). McKenna: "The leap on to the Cross—sore journey!"

67. "*Cloinn*" = your family (collective) or an individual member. Since the leap into the tomb comes before the harrowing of hell, "family" cannot mean humanity imprisoned in hell. Perhaps this line emphasizes Christ's sharing humanity with his forebears: as others have had their bodies entombed, so too does Christ participate in ("visit"?) the cultural ritual of burial? Does "visit" carry the sense of doing as his forebears did? Could this sense of "family" be related to "portion" in 19b ("*cin*") and 22b ("*cuid*")? McKenna: "The leap 'neath the Tomb—story for all time!"

68. Again indicative of address to an audience: "although harder to us [both collective sense (we the listeners) and individual sense (me)]." The word the poet uses for "step," "*céim*," rhymes with the word he has repeatedly used for "leap," "*léim*." McKenna: "yet sorer, I deem, was the journey to the Cross."

69. McKenna: "most famous of all leaps."

70. McKenna: "well it fitted Thee not to rest 'neath earth."

71. This line makes use of conventional bardic terms of praise usually reserved for a patron, here applied to Christ.

72. "Your appearance and your portion/followers [or, that of your portion/followers] were bitter." The "*cuid*" here would seem to denote the souls he is drawing out of hell, but whether they are his "*cuid*" because he is of their kinship or because he is rescuing them is unclear. McKenna: "dread Thy appearance and (that of) Thy followers (?)."

73. McKenna: "till Thou didst get the great booty (?)." McKenna's choice of "booty" unhappily conjures up the image of pirates or freebooters in unlawful possession of chattels; perhaps he thought of this word as applied to the devil ("recaptured the devil's booty from him"?) rather than to Christ. He has certainly correctly caught the sense of possession after contention, a resonance perhaps attributable to the third of the base texts for the leaps of Christ, Wis. 18:15 ("Thy almighty word leapt down from heaven from thy royal throne, as a fierce conqueror into the midst of the land of destruction").

It would seem the next stanza (23) might possibly represent the final leap, the Ascension ("wondrously through the clouds"), which is otherwise mentioned only in line 18d but is required to make up the number of leaps to eight (the number mentioned in line 18a):

~~(23a) Ó mhae déachglorifíoch
go socrúis th níngí le chéi clouds
éaga ón éora fáimh rianh
an chéa síoíne shúil a shíur.~~

Perhaps stanza 23 is making use of Hab. 3:11 ("The sun and the moon stood still in their

habitation”), which both Gregory and the Trinity homilist link to Cant. 2:8 (Gregory: “Who can be called the Sun except the Lord, and what the Moon except the Church?” Allen and Calder, *Sources and Analogues*, 80). In Donnchadh Mór’s verse, however, the sun and the moon are treated as elements of creation that testify to God’s power and worth, the topic of the remainder of the poem, as, for example, “The wind has made its song to you, / for it understood your work; / the sun has shone fiercely for thee, / these are the poet-band of the son of the king and queen” (25a–d).

74. Without knowing which Donnchadh Mór wrote the poem, or whether someone else did, we cannot even begin to guess whether the topos would have been in common currency among the laity in his day. Even if we could attribute the poem to the more famous, earlier poet, questions remain about whether he was a professed religious, perhaps the abbot of Boyle, or a layman trained in monastic fashion, as would be more common for a bardic poet. See further O’Donovan, ed., *Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland*, 3:308–9; O’Dwyer, *Mary: A History of Devotion in Ireland*, 76, 80; Douglas Hyde, *A Literary History of Ireland*, 466.

75. I have written elsewhere (“Christ the Falcon”) about the potential influence of the leaps on Langland’s image of Jesus coming to “perch” (*iouken*) in Mary’s chamber (18.125); on this passage, see also p. 132. The possibility seems the more likely, given the appearance of a series of leaps of Christ as flights of the falcon in an early fifteenth-century sermon for the dedication of an altar to St. Anne, preserved in British Library MS Harley 2268.

76. Luke 2:15: “the shepherds said to one another: [Let us go over to Bethlehem, and let us see this word that is come to pass, which the Lord hath shewed to us].”

77. Matt. 2:1: “there came wise men from the east [to Jerusalem].”

78. After he tells the Christmas story, Imaginatif explains what led him to think of it:

took; good heed

Why y haue tolde þe al þis, y toek ful gode
heede

How þou contraridest clergie with crabbed wordes, *ill-tempered*
That is, how lewede men and luythere lyhtloker were ysaued *unlearned; wicked; more readily*
Then connyng clerkes of kynde vnderstondyng. *knowledgeable; natural*
And thow saidest sothe of somme, Ac yse in what manere. (14.99–103 ~ B 12.155–59) *July; see*

In the C-text, as Pearsall points out, it was Rechlesnesse, not Will, who raised the objection to Clergy. *Piers Plowman: A New Annotated Edition*, n. to 11.295.

79. The phrase “þe plonte of pees” confused scribes. For the C-text: “þe] PER MQSFGN; om XJP2OLBUDVA. plonte] plente A; plentye R” (Russell and Kane); for B: “þe] om CF. plante] plant Cr; plente HmGOC2LF; plente WC; pleente M; planetes Y” (Kane and Donaldson). Robert Adams has argued that Langland’s “plonte of pees” probably derives from Augustine’s sermon 47 in *Sermones de vetere testamento*, where Augustine quotes the Septuagint version of Ezek. 34:29 (“And I will raise up for them a plant of peace”) and then additionally “paraphrases ‘plantam pacis’ as ‘plantatione’ [Souter = ‘plantation’ or ‘plant’] *caritatis*.” Adams, “Editing and the Limitations of the *Durior Lectio*”, 13.

80. Many B manuscripts: B.1.154: “eten his fille”; so Schmidt, 1:44; see his note, 2:316. Cf. the expanded version of the “Short Charter”: “To alle cristen be it knawene / That þe seed of grace in erthe is sawne, / Be me Jhesus of Nazareth” (ll. 37–39, Ashe, “The ‘Short Charter’,” 43).

This line is worth thinking about alongside the second line of *Erthe toc of erthe* (IMEV 3939) in its earliest form, which admits of an Incarnational reading:

Erþe toc of erþe erþe wip woh	<i>took from; woe</i>
Erþe oþer erþe to þe erþe droh	<i>dragged/enticed</i>
Erþe leyde erþe in erþene þroh	<i>tomb</i>
þo heuede erþe of erþe erþe ynoh.	<i>had; enough</i>

Murray, *The Middle English Poem, Erthe upon Erthe*, 1. This version is from MS BL Harl. 2253 (c. 1307), fol. 57v. “Droh” is an interesting word here, given its semantic range: *drawen* can mean to draw, pull, drag, carry, attract, entice, lure, turn someone or something into

something, be inclined to (*MED*, s.v. “drawen”). The former side of its range pitches the poem toward a meditation on mortality; the latter end admits a reading not unlike that of *Piers Plowman*, but with more of an emphasis on the attraction humanity has for Christ in his human nature: he is drawn to earth/humanity because of that affinity. See also my article, “Christ the Falcon,” for imagery of humanity as a lure for Christ as falcon (277–78).

81. Bennett, ed., *Piers Plowman: Prologue and Passus I–VII of the B Text*, 113–14; Bloomfield, *Piers Plowman as a Fourteenth-Century Apocalypse*, 59–61, 139; Heffernan, “*Piers Plowman* B.I.153–158”; Kean, “Langland on the Incarnation”; Lawler, “The Gracious Imagining of Redemption in ‘Piers Plowman’”; Ben H. Smith, *Traditional Imagery of Charity in Piers Plowman*, 26–34; Twomey, “Christ’s Leap,” 168.

Anne Middleton has kindly shared with me a portion of her exciting work-in-progress, which complements the points I am advancing here. Taking into account some school-text antecedents for some of Langland’s passages, including both the “plonte of pees” and love’s leap, she persuasively argues that Langland deliberately invokes not only the subject matter but also the *form* of such texts, and in doing so he intentionally and provocatively signals that poetics can make a sort of argument didacticism cannot match.

82. As Sister Clemente Davlin has noted, Langland’s active language not only draws the physicality of Christ’s body “in tension with” a focus on his divinity, but also in this passage heightens that tension by contrasting imagery of height and lowness in a way that merits comparison to the Johannine concept of Incarnation: “The extreme terms, ‘hevene . . . erthe,’ ‘loue . . . lowe erthe,’ are polar, like John’s terms for the incarnation which are unlike anything in the synoptics: ‘the Word was made flesh’ (1:14).” Davlin, “*Piers Plowman* and the Gospel and First Epistle of John,” 102. She comments here on the B-text.

83. As in Langland’s work, Christ’s ministry and the harrowing of hell are also associated with the spread of the Church in the botanical lyrics; see Chapter 5, pp. 181–97.

84. Although the Paris MS reads “in,” Sloane’s more daring “to” continues the dynamic action sequence. But see Glasscoe, “Visions and Revisions,” for her characterization of Paris as “a happier reading,” 111.

85. Although I have not been able to identify a specific source for the striking image of blood harrowing hell, it seems unlikely to me that the image was original to Julian; it has the sound of an established story about it. A synecdochic description of the harrowing of hell is not, in itself, atypical, given the episode’s source in the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus, where, in Johannine imagery, light calls for the gates of hell to be opened, and bursts their bonds. Compare, for instance, these lines from “The Dispute Between Mary and the Cross” (Fein, *Moral Love Songs*, ll. 244–47):

~~Through stones in the wilderness,
Men might better have crept; woe be sure,
When bored into heaven's bliss
until blood broke up the gate~~

"It was more possible for people to creep between stones in the wilderness than to pierce the heavens to gain eternal bliss, until [the] blood [of Christ] broke up the gate [of hell]." Although Fein has associated these lines with both childbirth and sexual intercourse by reading "gate" as "vagina," the context would seem to belie the former (because of "til": i.e., even after "blod brac up the yate," people would not be said to have "bored into hevене blis," because access to heaven is granted or denied by divine providence), and the latter would not apply in any case to the virgin Mary. See Fein, note to ll. 243–47, and Fein, "Form and Continuity in the Alliterative Tradition, 108–13. Compare also this fifteenth-century sermon:

But . . . owre lord and aller sauour ordaynid and wroght a worthy and gracijs remedy thorow hys precius blode, þe qwyk [*which*] was made a gracijs kay [key] to opyn þe 3atys [gates] of blysse þus sparid [*closed*] thorow owre synne; . . . Als anenis [*regarding*] þe fryst, þat þe precys blode of owre lord God was made þe kay of blysse, wyttnesse þe haly profyte, Ysaye 22, Dabo clauem Dauit super humerum eius, et non erit qui claudat, et cetera, "I schal gyue," says owre lord God, fadyr of heuyn, "þe gracijs kay of Dauid apon hys scholdrys"—3a! to opyn þe .atys of blysse—"and þere schall be nane [*no one*] þat schal spare [*close*] þam," þat is to say, to goode crysten men and wymen. Vpon þe qwyk says þe Glose þat be þis kay was vndyrstonde þe scharp crosse þat was layde vpon hys schuldere beryng yt hymself to hys passion; to þis acordys þe haly doctour, Seyn Ierom, *Sanguis*, inquit, *Christi clauis paradisi est*, "þe gracijs kay," says he, "of blysse is þe precius blode of Cryst." (O'Mara, *Four Middle English Sermons*, 83)

But see also Schmidt's commentary on *Piers Plowman* C.7.133 ("Feddest tho with thy fresshe blood oure forfadres in helle"); Schmidt adduces examples from the visual arts showing Christ's blood trickling down to Adam's mouth, including one in which Adam receives the blood in a chalice (2:543).

86. The blood's flowing engages what Vincent Gillespie and Maggie Ross have evocatively termed "a fluid word-knot" made up of "fill, fulfill, flow, overflow, beflow, overpass, passover," clustering both sound and sense in a theologically meaningful way. "Apophatic Image," 75.

87. The *Pearl-poet* does a similar thing by describing the Crucifixion in abstract terms as fluid generosity at a moment when God's courteous and aristocratic largess is entirely the point, as the Pearl-maiden repeatedly calls attention to the baptismal water that enables salvation of infants:

Bot þeron com ~~Neuþer kysst~~ remedy; immediately
Ryche blod ran on rode so roghe,
And wynne water; þen at þat plyt,
Be grace of God wex gret innoghe. (ll. 645–48).

cross; rough
delightful/precious; plight
grew; enough

Wolfgang Riehle has noted that "Julian of Norwich . . . is the only English mystic to include in her work the neo-Platonic concept of the world as a divine emanation: God has made creation ('alle kyndes') 'to flowe out of hym to werke his wylle', and this creation is redeemed by the pouring out of divine grace, which in turn is illustrated with emanatistic imagery." *Middle English Mystics*, 87.

88. Of course, because William Harvey formulated his argument about the circulation of blood early in the seventeenth century, Julian would not have understood the circulation of blood as we know it.

89. Increased devotion to relics of Christ's blood had drawn attention to a crucial question: did the holy blood remain conjoined with the divine Word even after body, soul, and blood were separated? If it did, was it still conjoined in the relics, and if so, would that mean that

Christ's body was not intact in heaven? The Franciscans and the Dominicans held opposing views. In a mid-fifteenth-century continuation of the debate, the Franciscans took an approach based in synecdoche, citing scripture's figurative character: the blood's capacity to save refers to Christ himself, "and in this way whatever is said of Jesus's blood should be ascribed to his death or to his life" ("et in hunc modum quecunque de sanguine Iesu dicuntur ad mortem eius uel ad vitam trahenda sunt"), Pius II, *Commentarii rerum memorabilium que temporibus suis contigerunt*, 2:659, l. 23, quoted by Holtz, "Cults of the Precious Blood in the Medieval Latin West," 300, n. 97, trans. mine. For specifics of the debate, which began in 1351, see Vincent, *The Holy Blood*, 82–117; Holtz, "Cults of the Precious Blood," 222–304; Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 66–68; or Marie-Dominique Chenu's brief account in the *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique* (s.v. "Sang du Christ"). The fifteenth-century continuation of this debate is discussed by Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, 112–31.

While Norwich Cathedral possessed a relic of the Holy Blood in the twelfth century, this relic does not appear to have been known in Norwich by the mid-thirteenth century. As Matthew Paris reports it, during the translation of a relic of Christ's blood to Westminster in 1247, the solemn Mass was celebrated by Walter Suffield, bishop of Norwich, who seems unaware of the Norwich relic (Holtz, "Cults of the Precious Blood," 60–61, 65). Its earlier presence raises the possibility that Julian's description of Christ's blood might have its roots in a local devotional cult of the sort that gained momentum in the fourteenth century. Other English sites with relics of the blood included Westminster Abbey, as well as the monasteries of Hailes in Gloucestershire and Ashridge in Buckinghamshire (Faber, *The Precious Blood*, 272; Holtz, "Cults of the Precious Blood," 65, 79, 85–86; Vincent, *The Holy Blood*, 137–53).

90. "It was precisely the Precious Blood, and nothing but the Precious Blood, which was the chosen instrument of our redemption" (Faber, *The Precious Blood*, 281). ". . . both the Blood and the Cross were credited with powers to ward off evil, and both presented vivid images of Christ's mediatory role for the needs of the human race. It was as a sign of Christ's pleading in heaven before his Father, not his suffering on earth, which suggested the use of the Blood on these days of solemn and collective petition [in Rogation and Ascensiontide]" (Holtz, "Cults of the Precious Blood," 95).

91. For a nuanced consideration of the poetic power of these lines, see Schmidt, *The Clerkly Maker*, 69–70, 115.

92. See Chapter 2, pp. 73–75.

93. E.g.:

Also I had in this more vnderstandyng: in that he shewid me that I should synne, I toke it nakidly to myne owne singular person, for I was none otherwise stirrid at that time; but be [by] the hey [high], gracious comfort of our lord that followid after, I saw that his menyng was for the general man, that is to sey, all man which is synfull and shall be into the last day; of which man I am a member, as I hope, be the mercy of God; for the blissid comfort that I saw, it is large enow [enough] for us all. (79.7–14)

. . . the threist of God is to have the general man into him, in which thirst he hath drawyn his holy that be now in bliss; and gettand his lively members, ever he drawith and drinkith, and yet he thristith and longith. (75.9–12)

94. Emmott, "Consciousness and Context-Building," 94.

95. The effect is a reversal of cognitive figure and ground; see p. 17.

96. Emmott, "Consciousness and Context-Building," 94.

97. "When a fiction fails to fulfill the expectations aroused by its form—we thought we were in Paris and here we are at the gates of hell—we look for a cause, and we look for allegory." Barney, *Allegories of History*, 17.

98. For examples, see Chapter 2, pp. 80–83.

99. Scholarship examining this phenomenon is vast. A few especially helpful accounts include Jill Mann's consideration of the examples of Lyer, Meed, and the search for Treuthe, in *Langland and Allegory*, esp. 3–12, as well as her observations on Wrath in "Eating and Drinking in 'Piers Plowman'" ("Wrath's rôle as cook, making 'wortes' out of 'wordes,' serves to introduce us to a major metaphorical use of the image of eating and drinking—the idea of eating words," 34); and A. C. Spearing's close reading of Wrath's confession, where, as he describes it, in the B-text, "The nuns' actual outbursts of angry words—'You're a liar!' and

‘You’re another!’—are momentarily personified with sufficient energy to leap forth,” while in the C version of this passage,

“thow lixt” becomes “lady” over all the sisters: that is, becomes mother superior of the convent. . . . There is of course no character in the poem called “Thow lixt!”, though there is one called Lyere, who at B II 216 leaps as “Thow lixt!” does at B V 161. But even the dividing line between what does and what does not count as a character in *Piers Plowman* is blurred by the insistent tendency of Langland’s poetic idiom towards momentary humanizations, and the coexistent rapidity and fluidity of movement that leaves them behind as soon as they are created. (*Readings in Medieval Poetry*, 226)

More generally, Morton Bloomfield’s work on personification allegory examines the role of the verb in Langland’s work and elsewhere. Bloomfield, “Personification-Metaphors,” 292: “In the case of personification-metaphors, the verb, verb phrase, or occasionally the adjective or adverb forces us to regard the inanimate noun subject (or occasionally object) as metaphorically a person.” See also Bloomfield, “A Grammatical Approach to Personification Allegory,” 165:

The really characteristic part of personification allegory in terms of aesthetic effect lies not in what nouns the writer chooses but in what predicates he attaches to his subjects Indeed we cannot even tell that “Truth” in the first sentence is a personification at all until we come to the verb.

100. Introduction, p. 9.

Chapter 4. Time in Narrative: The Teleology of History Meets the Timelessness of God “in plenitudo temporis”

1. Introduction, pp. 8–11.

2. Discussions of the Tree of Charity episode I have found especially helpful include Hanna, “The Tree of Charity—Again”; Zeeman, *Medieval Discourse of Desire*, 1–8; Cole, “Trifunctionality and the Tree of Charity”; Tavormina, “The Chilling of Charity”; Griffiths, *Personification in “Piers Plowman”*, 82–91; Aers, *Piers Plowman and Christian Allegory*, 79–109; Salter, *Piers Plowman: An Introduction*, 73–76; Donaldson, *Piers Plowman: The C-Text and Its Poet*, 180–96. Aside from Donaldson, scholars have tended to concentrate on the B-text.

3. Indeed, Galatians, with its interest in the law and Abraham’s faith, more fully informs passus 18 than may initially be apparent.

4. Chapter 1, pp. 26–31.

5. Mary Carruthers has identified this trope as *pictura* (“Allegory Without the Teeth”). David Aers called it a “picture model” (*Piers Plowman and Christian Allegory*, 89), while Elizabeth Salter termed it a “diagram” (*Piers Plowman: An Introduction*, 74, 75). See also my brief discussion of the differences between B and C: “Langland and the Truelove Tradition,” 37–39.

6. Like Derek Pearsall and A. V. C. Schmidt, I reject Russell and Kane’s emendation of 18.2: “Thow coutheest telle me and teche me [in] charite [to] leue.” While Will does want to know how to live in charity, in response to his question *Liberum Arbitrium leads him bodily* to the Tree of Charity. On one level, showing the way may be equivalent to showing how to live; however, given the ensuing action of 18.3, *Liberum Arbitrium’s* answer makes more sense as the manuscripts have it, “teach me [the way] to charity.” See also Pearsall’s note to 18.2 (p. 296): “as *Y leue*: the repetition (eliminated by emendation in RK) is taken here as an awkward overflow of politeness on the part of the newly deferential dreamer.”

7. This technique works much like underspecification in sense selection; see pp. 51–54.

8. Cf. Schmidt (2:660): “the smiles of a mother to a child before it has speech, or of lovers before they have first spoken.”

9. For a similar technique drawing on emanative growth and propagation in the botanical lyrics, see Chapter 5, pp. 181–97. See also D. Vance Smith on the verb *setten* (used in this passage by Langland for “planted”) in the Chester Cycle, where it “reaffirms the underlying idea that God’s essence is unchanged by creation”: *The Book of the Incipit*, 132. His treatment

of Incarnational passages in *Piers Plowman*, with his focus on beginnings, offers a useful complement to my comments on time. See his pages 130 to 132 for Peace's account of the Incarnation in B.18.212–15 ("god þat bigan al of his goode wille / Bicam man of a mayde mankynde to saue") and Faith's account in B.16.194–97 ("god, þat gynnyng hadde neuere but þo hym good þou3te, / Sente forþ his sone as for seruauht þat tyme / To ocupie hym here til issue were spronge, / That is children of charite, and holi chirche þe moder"). See, further, my discussion of the Christological associations of "true love" in Chapter 2 and in "Langland and the Truelove Tradition." On the "plonte of pees," see pp. 115–17, above. On the graft, see Ben H. Smith, *Traditional Imagery of Charity*, 60.

10. The Christological implications of "trewe loue" point toward the planting as the Incarnation. Nevertheless, numerous other references point in the direction of Genesis and the Creation (not least of them the garden, the tree, the fruit [5, 29, 33, etc.], the fiend [43], apples [62]), in which case the planting looks more like the image of God in mankind. Such a line of thought eventually leads to a the-apple-does-not-fall-far-from-the-tree version of humanity ("Adam was as tre and we aren as his apples" [68]). Indeed, *Liberum Arbitrium* briefly tells Will the story of the Creation (90–93) and mentions Adam as being among the fruit on the tree (112). *Liberum Arbitrium*'s treatment of Adam demonstrates succinctly the fluidity of Langland's allegory, which moves associatively and rapidly; there is no one-to-one correspondence of signification throughout, or it would seem strange for example that Adam is "as tre" but also among the fruit, which at line 12 signifies "good works" and at line 29 and following represents humanity hierarchically, arranged according to marital status. The potential overlay of the Fall and the Incarnation is very close to Julian's treatment of time in her "example" of the lord and the servant, on which see more below.

11. In B, the Tree of Charity sequence is a dream within a dream that occurs after Anima describes the tree. The inner dream ensues because Will swoons when Anima tells him *Liberum Arbitrium* has leased the land from Piers Plowman (in B.16.45 *Liberum Arbitrium* is termed Piers's "lieutenaunt"). Piers then appears to Will in vision (the inner dream). In C, Langland eliminates the beginning of the inner dream but preserves the waking from the dream here at line 178, so that Will appears to wake up from the same dream twice (here and at 19.336). On the structure of the dreams, see Schmidt, "The Inner Dreams in *Piers Plowman*."

12. Given that C puts forward *Liberum Arbitrium* as the instructing figure (in B, the instructor is Piers Plowman), the problematical moment when Will asks to taste the fruit leads to a slightly (but only slightly) less perplexing result theologically in C than in B. I have written previously on the savagery of Will's potentially cannibalistic desire ("Christ the Falcon," 281–82).

13. Langland uses a similar technique in passus 8 when Piers calls on Hunger to motivate the workers who should be helping him plow his half acre (8.168ff.). In both cases, a character calls for help from a personification of a human experience that affects the body in strikingly physical ways (both in real life and in the narrative).

14. Yet, as Carl Schmidt reminds me (personal communication, August 8, 2011), in the synoptic Gospels Christ speaks of John the Baptist as the greatest of prophets, and as "one crying out in the desert" he is linked specifically to Isaiah's prophecy (Matt. 11:9–10; Mark 1:2–4; Luke 1:76, 7:26–28; Isaiah 40:3).

15. The modern colloquial sense of "shake down" was not available to Langland, but there is something entirely appropriate, it seems, to thinking of Elde's interaction with the fruit as a mugging—or worse! Langland certainly portrays Elde as a bit of a tough, here but especially in passus 22 (see n. 16). In B, Piers Plowman is the one who shakes the apples from the tree; Elde is not part of the scene in B.

16. With the possible exception of Elde, Langland does not explicitly invoke the topos of the Ages of Man in C, as he does at B.12.1–9 (in *The Parlement* there are three: Youth, Middle Age, and Old Age). One might perhaps hear an echo of Youth in Langland's depiction of Lyf in passus 22 (22.152–79), just before Elde returns, with Death not far behind, and attacks Will in an usually personal moment presented with wry humor that nevertheless suggests pathos. In passus 22, Will is a bystander in a battle between Conscience and the forces of the Antichrist when Elde, chasing after Lyf and apparently not noticing Will in his way, runs over Will's head and makes him bald. Will curses Elde, upbraiding him for his discourtesy. Will thus makes himself the focus of Elde's new attack. Elde strikes at Will with old age, making him deaf and knocking out his teeth. Most bitterly for Will, Elde makes him impotent as well

(22.183–203). John Burrow details various medieval schemes of the stages of life in *The Ages of Man*.

17. Ginsberg, ed., *Wynner and Wastoure and The Parlement of the Thre Ages*:

“... noghte es sekire to youreselfe in certayne bot dethe *nothing; certain; for sure except*
And he es so uncertayne that sodaynly he comes” (ll. 635–36) *unpredictable*

Other poems written by Langland’s contemporaries further drive home the point that no one knows the hour of his own death, but we all know we will die (*Pearl*, *The Book of the Duchess*, *The Awntyrs off Arthure*); mortality’s equal-opportunity approach must have been especially apparent to and foremost in the minds of those living in the time of the Black Death. Langland vividly drives the point home at C.22.100ff. Furthermore, not everyone who desires death achieves his desire, as Will at C.22.203, the man in black in *The Book of the Duchess*, and the Old Man in Chaucer’s *Pardoner’s Tale* remind us.

18. I use *cognitive framework* in the linguists’ sense of a story frame model in which known logic operates and predictable characters or props are to be expected. A detailed explanation of the concept may be found in Chapter 5, “Frames and Constructions,” in Ungerer and Schmid, *Introduction to Cognitive Linguistics*, 207–56.

19. It is worth noting that the hugely effective starkness of the clash between life and death first comes at a moment that looks back to this passage with Elde:

Deth saith a wol fordo and adowns he <i>he</i> by <i>by</i> ange <i>ange</i> hilate <i>hilate</i>	
All þat lyueth or loketh a londe or a watre	<i>who live or see [i.e., everyone]; on</i>
Lyf saith þat a lyeth and leyeth his lyf to wedde,	<i>he lies; offers his life as a pledge</i>
That for al þat deth can do, withynne thre dayes to walke	
And feche fro þe fende Peres fruyt þe plouhman	<i>from; the fruit of Piers the Plowman</i>
And legge hit þere hym liketh and lucifer bynde.	<i>place; wherever</i>
And forbete and adowne brynge bale deth for euere:	<i>beat up; destructive</i>
<i>O mors ero mors tua. (20.28–3 4a)</i>	<i>Oh death, I will be your death (Hos. 13:14)</i>

As Pearsall notes in his edition, the reference to “the fruit of Piers the Plowman” in line 32 may be explained by remembering that in B it is Piers, not Liberum Arbitrium, who tends the tree (B.16.20–89). See also Pearsall’s note to line 34 for a reason to prefer “forbite” to “forbete,” and lines 20.402 to 20.403 for the imagery of the “doctour of deth” versus the “lord of lyf.”

20. With the sonorous open vowels of “moued” and “moed” linking the will of God with God’s motion in bestirring himself into active engagement with the material world, perhaps Langland intended a reverberation here of the opening lines of Genesis, with the spirit of God moving over the waters to create light, then earth, then heaven, and so forth (Gen. 1:2). Although Langland does not explicitly invoke “*in principio*,” we might hear a distant echo of “in the beginning,” the *incipit* of the Gospel of John as well: “In the beginning God created heaven, and earth” (Gen. 1:1); “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). With the previous action so focused on the tree, and the coming action so metaphysically imagined, Creation and Incarnation are suitably linked by the deictic “Thenne”—“at that time,” or “it came to pass”—of line 117.

21. The *Beowulf* poet makes effective use of a similar time-oriented tactic to link a past time with the ongoing present, differentiating the story time of there/then from the (Christian) present day, yet maintaining continuity between the two and demonstrating the earlier time’s significance with respect to the present:

se wæs mon-cynnes mægenes strengest
on þæm dæge þysses lifes
“he [Beowulf] was the strongest of all living men *at that time in this world*” (emphasis mine;
lit., “in those days of this life”)

Chickering, *Beowulf: A Dual-Language Edition*, 60–61, ll. 196–97.

Dante does a similar thing, without the deictics “those” and “this,” by means of the inclusive “our life”:

Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita
“Midway in the journey of our life”

Alighieri, *Inferno* 1.1; trans. Hollanders, 2–3. Cf. Macklin Smith on B.16.183 (“Þat oon doop alle doop and ech doop bi his one”) “What happens during the Tree of Charity and Abraham/Faith episodes happens, quite literally, all over the place, internally and externally, then and now, temporally and eternally” (“Did Langland Read the *Lignum Vitae*?”, 157).

22. Cf. 20.161–65a ~ B.18.158–62a:

And so shal this deth fordo, y dar my lyf
legge,

annihilate; put down as a wager

All [at deth and þe deuél dede formost to Eue
And riht as the gylour thorw gyle bigiled man formost
So shal grace þat bigan al maken a goéd ende
And bigile þe gilour, and [at is goéd sleithe:
Ars vt Artem falleret.

*ruse
one stratagem deceives another*

23. As Del Chessell notes (“The Word Made Flesh,” 115), “The quietness of that ‘And thanne’ makes one feel this once-in-all-time event as perfectly natural.” Schmidt (2:664) calls attention to the probable influence of *Pange lingua*, the same hymn in which “*Ars vt artem falleret*” occurs: “The ‘moment’ [of the fullness of time] is that of Christ’s death; but the pointed conjunction of this text with *Iesus . . . chaumbre* at 126 suggests the influence of Fortunatus’s ‘Pange lingua’, which was sung on Good Friday at the Adoration of the Cross: ‘And so when came the fullness / of the sacred time [*sacri plenitudo temporis*], / The Son who made the world was sent / down from his Father’s clime / And went forth clothed in flesh assumed / within a virgin womb’ (st. 4).”

24. Russell and Kane add a problematical period here. While the sense is difficult to determine, both “that” in line 127 and “that” in line 128 likely ought to be translated as “when”: “until the fullness of time’s time had come—when Old Age [would] fell the fruit again before it came to be ripe—when Jesus should joust to determine by judgment of arms who should fetch this fruit, the fiend or Jesus himself.” Both clauses beginning “that” appear to modify “Til *plenitudo temporis* tyme ycome were.” While it is possible that “that” in “that iesus” of line 128 is a demonstrative pronoun referring back to “oen Iesus” of line 125 (which Jesus? *that* Jesus!), or as a distinct reference to a person of the Trinity (MED, s.v. “that [def. art. & adj.],” def. 2a), these difficult lines are centered more on *when* than they are on *which one*.

25. Burrow, *Langland’s Fictions*, 63.

26. Luke delays a focus on Satan’s defeat at this point, reserving the subject for the Magnificat a few lines later (Luke 1:46–55).

27. See Chapter 2, p. 228, n. 6.

28. See also *Pange lingua*, quoted by Schmidt in my n. 23, above.

29. In addition to its Latin-derived sense of “to humble oneself, condescend” [MED, s.v. “demitten, v.”], “demyt” is a technical term with significance for land tenure. See J. H. Baker, *Manual of Law French*, 87: “demettre, demitter, 1, to demise, to let. . . [L. *dimittere*]”; *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources*, s.v. “*dimissio*” and “*dimittere*.”

30. For a fuller reading of the time sequence at work in this passage, see Cervone, “Christ the Falcon,” 281–82.

31. See especially Marx, *The Devil’s Rights and the Redemption*, 100–113.

32. While line 128 refers to the Crucifixion, the cognitive framework called up by the legalistic references to “fals biheste” (122), “a Iustices sone” (125), and “iugement” (128) suggests a judicial accounting. With great poetic economy, Langland has suggestively compressed his imagery so as to embrace the whole of salvation history, from Creation to eschaton.

33. My thanks to Ann Astell for the suggestion.

34. Perhaps the word “hy” here recalls the seasonal sense of time used in the Tree of Charity sequence. Cf. *Pearl*:

If so, there might be a hint—but only a hint—of Christ’s coming death.

35. David Aers’s discussion of Augustine and the Good Samaritan episode, particularly with regard to Semyuif (the man to whom the Good Samaritan ministers), offers a useful complement to my comments on Christ the physician. In his reading, Aers is characteristically sensitive to Langland’s use of time (e.g., “As in the liturgy, time present and time past both become present,” 99), and to how the experience of sin is enacted allegorically in the ontological reality of Semyuif (*Salvation and Sin*, chap. 4, esp. 97–119). Earlier medicinal imagery in the poem includes Holy Church’s assertion that “Mesure is medecyne” (1.33), that “loue ys triacle [*antidote for venom*] to abate [*reduce to nothing*] synne / And most souerayne salue for soule and for body” (1.146–47, just before the Incarnational passage “Loue is pe plonte of pees”), and also her observation (anticipating 18.137) that “loue is lecche [*physician*] of lyf and lysse [*relief*] of alle payne” (1.199). In the Gospel, Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan to answer the question, “who is my neighbor?,” which follows from an earlier question, “what must I do to possess eternal life?” (Luke 10:25–33); cf. Will’s query of Holy Church: “Teche me to no tresor but telle me this ilke [*same*; i.e., ‘tell me this thing I ask.’], / How y may saue my soule . . .” (1.79–80).

It is also worth noting that in his discussion of the exegetical and homiletical background that parallels Langland’s emphasis on the speed of the Samaritan’s journey, Thomas D. Hill quotes Haymo of Halberstadt and Augustine, both of whom draw on the leaps of Christ to associate the Samaritan with the incarnate Christ, though Hill does not note the importance of the leaps scheme here (to be sure, neither Haymo nor Augustine calls these events leaps, but the scheme is unmistakable). Haymo (“Homilia 125, Dominica Decima Quanta Post Pentecosten,” *PL* 118, 673; quoted by Hill, “The Swift Samaritan’s Journey,” 188):

This Samaritan made a journey from heaven to the womb, from the womb to the Cross, from the Cross to the tomb, [and] from the tomb to heaven again.

Augustine (*Enarrationes in Psalmos*, “Psalmus 18, enarratio 2, par. 6,” CCSL 38, 109–10; quoted by Hill, 190):

Like a bridegroom coming out of his marriage chamber, *he leaps up like a giant to run his course with joy: he pitched his tent in the sun*. When the word was made flesh he was like a bridegroom who found himself a bridal chamber in a virgin’s womb. Once wedded to human nature, he came forth from that purest of all rooms, humbler in mercy than all others, stronger than all in majesty. What is meant by *he leaps up like a giant to run his course*, is that he was born, he grew, he taught, he suffered, he rose, he ascended; he ran his course he did not tarry on the way.

36. The Galatians passage that gives Langland *plenitudo temporis* also offers the notion of a son’s tutoring “until the time appointed by the father”:

Now I say, as long as the heir is a child, he differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all;

But is under tutors and governors *until the time appointed by the father*:

So we also, when we were children, were serving under the elements of the world.

But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent his Son, made of a woman, made under the law:

That he might redeem them who were under the law: that we might receive the adoption of sons.

And because you are sons, God hath sent the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying: Abba, Father.

Therefore now he is not a servant, but a son. And if a son, an heir also through God. (Gal. 4:1–7, emphasis added)

37. See Chapter 1, pp. 26–31.

38. There are many resonances of the Gospel and epistles of John throughout passus 19.

And Piers þe Plowman parceyued plener *full*
tyme

And lered hym lechecraft his lif for to saue

That, þou3 he were wounded with his enemy, to warisshen hymself

taught; doctoring skills

by; cure

While “the fullness of time” appears in B as “plener tyme,” C strengthens the link between the moment of the Incarnation and the lived life of Christ by reiterating the Latin phrase, *plenitudo temporis*. C also drops the notion of Christ learning to save his own life by healing himself.

40. See n. 10, above.

41. He also implies clerics might not be “clenneste” and “fayreste,” as they *should* be.

42. Some manuscripts omit “him.”

43. A few lines later Langland signals a similar sort of reading method when he tells the story of Jesus throwing the merchants out of the temple (18.155–62). We have already seen *plenitudo temporis* linked to the Crucifixion. Though lines 159 and 160 do not use the phrase “*plenitudo temporis*,” nevertheless they offer another version of the concept, with reference to the overthrowing of the temple (John 2:21: “he spoke of the temple of his body”): “And when [þat my will is [= the fullness of time?] y wol hit ouerthrowe / And ar thre dayes aftur edefye hit newe,” which Langland glosses typologically: “Ac þe ouerturnynge of the temple bitokened his resurreccioun” (162). For comparison, “Flourdelys” uses similar language for the moment Christ leaves the tomb to harrow hell: “And whon god wolde [desired] · he went his way” (l. 55).

44. “Example” is the term Julian uses (51.6; 51.72; etc.), even though “parable,” the word now commonly used in scholarship on *A Revelation*, was available in her day as a word also signifying an exemplum (*MED*, s.v. “parable”).

45. Glasscoe: “as clene as holy as angelys.”

46. Appropriately, she calls it not just an “example” but a “mystye example” (51.72). Unlike a preacher’s exemplum, which would strive to clarify a difficult topic or offer a memorable narrative or image, her “example” is too deeply rich for its full implications to be entirely grasped. For my line of argument in this paragraph and the ones immediately following, I am indebted to Watson and Jenkins, note to 51.1, p. 272, which helped to focus my thought on what I am calling an “apt congruity.” Watson and Jenkins identify Julian’s example as a *similitude*, “in which divine truths are described in closely analogous human terms. Significance is generated not by the gap between vehicle and tenor, story and meaning—as is the case in some of Jesus’ parables, whose improbability is their point—but by their congruity.”

47. I want to say “aptitude” but only, I think, because it would yoke “aptness” and “pulchritude” to “capability”: in this sense, “aptitude” would be “beautiful aptness” that also demonstrates its maker’s cleverness (in this case, God’s).

48. On *Rhetoric*, 3.10.4–5. See my Chapter 1, p. 35. Cf. Geoffrey of Vinsauf (*Poetria nova*, trans. Nims, 4.946–49, p. 118): “Two elements combine here, the laudable and the laborious; to transpose a word aptly is laborious, to succeed in transposing it aptly is laudable. When meaning comes clad in such apparel, the sound of words is pleasant to the happy ear, and delight in what is unusual stimulates the mind.” Cf. also Augustine: “Nobody, however, has any doubt about the facts, both that it is pleasanter in some cases to have knowledge communicated through figures, and that what is attended with difficulty in the seeking gives greater pleasure in the finding” (*On Christian Doctrine* 2.6.8); Blasko and Connine: “a highly apt metaphor tends to be one in which the domains of the topic and vehicle are relatively distant but the within-domain features are relatively close in semantic space The between domain distance must be fairly large for the metaphor to be effective because close distances provide little interaction or surprise” (“Effects of Familiarity,” 296).

49. See Introduction, p. 17. The doubleness she sees in the servant is not spatial but conceptual.

50. She associates the first of these with her initial experience of the “example,” and the second with guided further understanding, or interpretation of it, within the vision itself (as opposed to when she mulls over the vision’s significance later, although she also reports an

instance of having “techyng inwardly” nearly twenty years after the initial revelation, 51.88).

51. These do not replicate the earlier division into “gostly in bodily lyknes” and “more gostly without bodyly lyknes”:

The frest is the begynnyng of techyng that I understod therein in the same tyme; the ii is the inward lernyng that I have vnderstodyn therein sithen [*since*]; the iii al the hole revelation from the begynnyng to the end, that is to sey, of this boke, which our lord God of his goodnes bryngeth oftentymes frely to the syte of myn vnderstandyng. And these iii arn so onyd [united], as to my vnderstandyng, that I cannot, ner may, depart them. (51.76–83)

The first thus embraces both “gostly in bodily lyknes” and “more gostly without bodyly lyknes,” the second just “more gostly without bodyly lyknes,” and the third both again.

52. Here her attention is only on the servant’s human perspective, not the knowledge Christ would have in his divinity. Some aspects of the servant’s experience only apply to Adam or to Christ, particularly once she begins to consider Christ’s role.

53. Adam’s status as a pre-lapsarian gardener is indicated by Genesis 2:15: “And the Lord God took man, and put him into the paradise for pleasure, to dress it, and keep it.” God decrees Adam’s post-lapsarian physical labor at Gen. 3:17–19: “cursed is the earth in thy work; with labour and toil shalt thou eat thereof all the days of thy life. / Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou eat the herbs of the earth. / In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread till thou return to the earth, out of which thou wast taken: for dust thou art, and into dust thou shalt return.” Also pertinent for Julian’s identification of the servant as a gardener is John 20:15, the verse in which Mary Magdalene mistakes Christ for a gardener (after his resurrection but before his ascension).

54. I would not wish to lean too hard on the wording of Genesis, which underpins Julian’s imagery but is not a source per se. Nevertheless, it is worth noting the conjunction in Genesis of ideas and imagery Julian draws together at this point, particularly the generative work of creation, agriculture, fruiting, irrigation, and the earth God uses to create Adam (Gen. 2:5–7):

And every plant of the field before it [the creation of the sun, the moon, and the stars] sprung up in the earth, and every herb of the ground before it grew: for the Lord God had not rained upon the earth; and there was not a man to till the earth.

But a spring rose out of the earth, watering all the surface of the earth. And the Lord God formed man of the slime of the earth . . .

As chapter fifty-one progresses, Julian increasingly identifies the “tresor in the erth” with humanity itself. The earthy nature of humanity’s generation is suggested by Julian’s term “medlur” to describe the mingled or mixed quality of the cloth of the servant’s garment (on which see further below).

55. Watson and Jenkins retain the less technical reading from Paris, as do Colledge and Walsh. Sloane: “and than he shuld take this mete, *with the drinke in the mete*” (Glasscoe, 51.201, emphasis added); Paris: “and than he shulde take this met *with the drinke*” (Watson and Jenkins, 51.169–70, emphasis added). Watson and Jenkins are silent on the eucharistic overtones of Sloane. Colledge and Walsh call the following clause (“and beryn it ful worshipfully aforn the lord”) eucharistic, but do not address the eucharistic imagery of Sloane’s “with the drinke in the mete” (p. 531, n. to l. 200):

Again, the context becomes eucharistic, and the figure of the servant becomes the priest, whose forerunner is Melchisedech (Genesis 14.18), as is emphasized in Hebrews 7.1 e.s., and also in the Roman canon of the Mass: . . . et quod tibi obtulit summus sacerdos tuus Melchisedech sanctum sacrificium . . . (*Missale Romanum* 1474, 1 208).

56. I am thinking of fluid generosity of the sort the *Pearl-poet* taps into for “He lauez [*pours out*] Hys gyftez as water of dyche [*from a ditch*]” (607), which builds toward:

Bot peron com a bote astyt: *remedy; soon*
Ryche blod ran on rode so roghe,
And wyne water; þen, at þat plyt,
þe grace of God wex gret innoghe.

cross; rough
precious; plight
enough

Innoghe þer wax out of þat welle,
 Blod and water of brode wounde
 Þe blod vus bo3t fro bale of helle,
 And delyuered vus of þe deth secounde;
 Þe water is baptem, þe soþe to telle,
 Þat fol3ed þe glayue so gymly grounde,
 Þat waschez away þe gyltez felle
 Þat Adam wyth inne deth vus drounde. (645–56)

from broad
 bought; sorrow/pain
 delivered; from
 truth
 followed the spear
 deadly sins

(Of course Julian's "example" does not have the Pearl-poet's emphasis on baptism.) The fact that Julian sees the servant fall into a "slade" rather than simply on flat ground perhaps reinforces a distant echo of a channel such as may be carved out by rushing water. The servant's digging seems to produce the ditch into which he falls, which makes more sense when one perceives the servant as Christ than it does for Adam.

57. Paris has "full holsomly"; Julian's *A Vision* (her Short Text) has "fullye" (Watson and Jenkins, 394).

58. "[L]icor" is an interesting choice here: in Middle English the word is used for the water of baptism (*MED*, s.v. "licour (n)," 1a) as well as for blood, milk, sap, and bodily fluids that enable or sustain generative growth, both botanical and animal (*MED*, 1b; a well-known example occurs in the first lines of the *General Prologue* to *The Canterbury Tales*: "Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote [sweet] / The droghte of March hath perced to the roote, / And bathed every veyne in swich licour / Of which vertu [power] engendred is the flour," ll. 1-4). The word is also used for wine, including communion wine (*MED*, 2a), and medicine (*MED*, 3b), so it covers quite a range of ways in which the "blissid blode" might be "service[able]."

59. Julian's vision of Christ's blood begins in her chapter four and continues in chapters seven and twelve. See my earlier discussion of this passage in Chapter 3, pp. 118–20.

60. As with *Pearl*, the "swete flodes" might also evoke the river that flows from the throne of God (Rev. 22:1); Revelation is similarly a likely source for chapter twelve's imagery of washing in the blood (Rev. 7:14) and for "fulfilling the noumber that failith" (Rev. 6:11).

61. See below, p. 153.

62. While the Middle English phrase "in time" here would more accurately correspond to Present Day English "at the appropriate time" than to "before it is too late," the distinction is unimportant, since in this case "the appropriate time" would be "before the plants die," or "not too late"! It is not surprising to find Middle English "in time" associated with Genesis, as here; see, for example, *Piers Plowman*, where the sense is clearly "at the appropriate time": "3e þat han wyues ben war and worcheth nat out of tyme / As Adam dede and Eue, as y whil er [before] tolde" (10.288–89) [the result of their untimely intercourse was Cain].

63. See, further, n. 58, above.

64. E.g., "in al this our good lord shewid his owne Son and Adam but one man" (51.231); "in the syte of God al man is on man and on man is all man" (51.105–6); "in the servant is comprehendid Adam: that is to sey, all men" (51.213–14); "by Adam I understond all man" (51.222); "for the langor and desire of al mankynd that shal be sauid aperid in Iesus; for Iesus is al that shal be sauid and al that shal be sauid is Iesus" (51.267–69).

65. See my discussion of "we be his corone" at pp. 75–79. The Son's gift comes in chapter fifty-five:

and Criste in his body mytyly berith [us] up into hevyn; for I saw that Crist, us al havand in him that shal be sauid be him, worshipfully presentith his Fader in hevyn with us; which present ful thankfully his Fader receivith and curtesly gevith to his Son, Iesus Criste; which geft and werkynge is ioie to the Fader and bliss to the Son and likyng to the Holy Gost. (55.5–11)

66. Her treatment of this concept is also very similar to Langland's. See, e.g., the lines immediately following Langland's "plonte of pees" passage (1.155–57 ~ B.1.159–61):

Forthi is loue ledare of þe lordes folk of heuene *leader*
 And a mene, as þe Mayre is, bitwene þe kyng and þe comune; *intermediary*, "*mean*"; *mayor*
 Ryht so is loue a ledare and þe lawe shapeth

I requote the “plonte of pees” passage in n. 72, below.

67. I discussed this passage, “And what tyme that he of his goodnes will shewin hym to man, he shewith him homley as man,” at p. 142, above.

68. On clothing as a Christian metaphor, see pp. 72–75, above.

69. Although Colledge and Walsh and Watson and Jenkins agree in glossing the “hymself” of “in hymself present” as referring to the lord (Colledge and Walsh: “in his (the lord’s) very presence,” p. 532, n. to l. 208; Watson and Jenkins, “into his own presence,” p. 282, n. to l. 176), “hymself” more likely speaks to the person of the Son as represented in the servant, rather than to the lord. The Son, as servant, prepares (transforms) humanity and brings the “mete”/“tresor” to the lord, an action that is at once eucharistic and generously aristocratic (like Malory’s Sir Gareth, Julian’s servant betrays his high lineage in his manner of serving). Like the phrase “with the drink in the mete,” “in hymself present” makes an important theological point, in this case referring to the material status of the Second Person of the Trinity appearing before the First Person at the Ascension, the Son having gone *in person* to hell to retrieve Adam and others and eventually appearing in the flesh before the Father. Julian is careful to insist on the importance of Christ’s (human) person elsewhere, e.g.:

he is with us in hevyn, *very [true] man in his owne person* us updrawand, and that was shewid in the gostly thrist; and he is with us in erth us ledand [leading], and that was shewid in the thrid, wher I saw God in a poynte; and he is with us in our soule endlesly wonand [dwelling], us reuland and yemand [*ruling and governing*] and that was shewid in the xvith, as I shal sey. (52.39–44, emphasis added)

Place and time are important in this passage, too: because of the hypostatic union, the Son is simultaneously substantially (materially) present in heaven, thirsting for all humanity to join him there and drawing humanity to him; on earth, leading each and all of “us” in a “poynte”; and within each soul, perpetually ruling and guiding the individual.

Julian is very technical and correct in her consideration of the distinctions to be drawn among Persons of the Trinity, yet is careful not to imply that the Persons are not united. See, for example, her precise qualification of the love the servant has for the lord: “in him was shewid a ground of love, which love he had to the lord was even like to the love that the lord had to hym” (51.174–76). The servant’s love is just like/equivalent to/of equal status with the lord’s love.

70. Much later, Julian reverses the image to emphasize indwelling and God’s eternal present: “And ryte the same we shall be withoute end, the same we were tresurid in God, and hidde, knowen and lovid from withoute begynnynge” (53.56–58). God has always cherished humanity and always will, as the loving gaze of the lord in the example demonstrates.

71. See, e.g., the language of place at 51.55–56: “an inward gostly shewing of the lords menyng descendid into my soule. . . .”

72. See pp. 115–17, above, esp. p. 252, n. 82, on height and depth in the Johannine understanding of the Incarnation. Like Langland, Julian links the *action* of Incarnation with a parallel and seemingly instantaneous reversal. For comparison (1.148–54 ~ B.1.151–58):

Loue is þe plonte of pees, most precious of
vertues,

For heuene holde hit ne myghte, so heuy hit semede,
Til hit hadde of erthe y3oten hitsilue.
And when hit hadde of þe folde flesch and blode taken
Was neuer lef vppon lynde lyhtere theraftur
And portatif and persaunt as þe poynt of a nelde
That my3te non Armure hit lette ne none heye walles.

*heavy; seemed
begotten
earth
leaf upon linden tree lighter
agile; piercing; needle
armor; stop; high*

73. In the phrase “for whom he was sent,” “he” must be Christ and *not* Adam; the same must be true throughout the following sentence.

74. For “the grit rote,” Colledge and Walsh read “the great root,” linking the word to the Jesse tree, an image that emphasizes the genealogy of Jesus as a generative and binding force (Colledge and Walsh, 542, n. to 51.300). Watson and Jenkins read “the mighty company”

(286, n. to 51.255). The local sense certainly points toward the latter rather than the former, but perhaps a distant echo of “root” applies (the same pun is at work in “Truelove”; see p. 184, below). Julian is concerned here with the theological point that humanity has been joined ever more firmly to God through the incarnate Christ (“was knyght to hym”), though she elsewhere emphasizes that God’s act of creation itself initiated the jointure, and indeed the coexistence of Adam and Christ in the servant reinforces that very point. Elsewhere she uses the verb “rooted” to reinforce the closeness of God and humanity, sometimes with special attention to the Second Person’s role, and almost always in concert with “and grounded,” a lexical choice that resonates with the agricultural, generative imagery from the “example” as well as with the Jesse tree. See, e.g.: “our lif is all groundid and rotid in love” (49.8–9; cf. Eph. 3:17–18: “that being rooted and founded in charity / You may be able to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth, and length, and height, and depth”); “our soule sittith in God in very rest and our soule stondith in God in very strength and our soule is kindly rotid in God in endles love” (56.17–19); “for the Trinite is comprehendid in Criste in whome our heyer partie is groundid and rotid, and our lower partie the second person hath taken, which kynd [*nature*] first [from *the beginning*] to him was adyte [prepared]” (57.24–26); “and the second person of the Trinite is our moder in kynde in our substantiall makeyng, in whome we arn groundid and rotid, and he is our moder in mercy in our sensualite takyng” (58.44–46); “Love and drede [*fear*] are brethren; and thei arn rotid [*rooted*] in us be the goodnes of our maker” (74.22–24).

75. See pp. 43–46. She does something similar in chapter fifty-two, to distinguish Adam’s work from Christ’s (52.94–99):

... for it is all one love; which on blissid love hath now in us double working; for in the lower part arn peynes and passions [*compassions*], ruthes and pites, mercies and forgevenes and swich other that arn profitable; but in the higer parte are none of these, but al on hey love and mervelous ioye, in which mervelous ioy all peynis are heylly restorid.

76. Gen. 3:17: “And to Adam he said: Because thou hast hearkened to the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldst not eat, cursed is the earth in thy work; with labour and toil shalt thou eat thereof all the days of thy life.” Note Julian’s pronoun “our” in conjunction with “life,” cf. Dante’s “midway in the journey of our life” (n. 21, above).

77. See also Steiner, “Medieval Documentary Poetics,” 95: “Notice that the verse from Lamentations (*O vos omnes*), traditionally identified with Christ’s lament from the cross, is compared to the standard address of a charter (*Sciunt presentes & futuri*) by way of the English translation: both the scriptural and legal quotation suggest that any reader may receive Christ’s revelation as if in the presence of Christ himself.” For *O vos omnes* in the tradition of Christ as lover-knight, see Woolf, *English Religious Lyric*, 36–44.

78. Cf. *Piers Plowman* 18.159–60 ~ B.16.131–32: “And when þat my will is [= *the fullness of time*] y wol hit ouerthrowe / And ar thre dayes aftur edefye hit newe.” See n. 43, above.

79. Paris: “new.”

80. See p. 17, above. “Simultaneous narration” in the visual arts refers to the practice of juxtaposing episodes from a narrative sequence, to be read in relation to one another. I do not mean “simultaneous narration” as narratologists use it, in Gérard Genette’s sense of a narrator telling a story precisely at the time it occurs: *Narrative Discourse*, 218–19.

81. See pp. 106–7, above.

82. Ridderbos, “The Man of Sorrows,” 178. Cf. Black (“More about Metaphor,” 22): “Tacit knowledge of such literal meaning [as may be discerned in a ‘literal’ statement] induces the characteristic feeling [when reading a metaphorical statement] of dissonance or ‘tension’ between the focus [of the metaphorical statement] and its literal ‘frame’.” Black asserts that “Enthusiastic friends of metaphor are indeed prone to various kinds of inflation, ready to see metaphor everywhere” (20), a stance he himself rejects. Nevertheless, he is firmly in the camp of those who, like Richards (see p. 32, above), perceive metaphor not as a rhetorical flourish but as a form that itself encodes meaning: “the available literal resources of the language being insufficient to express our sense of the rich correspondences, interrelations, and analogies of domains conventionally separated . . . metaphorical thought and utterance sometimes embody insight expressible in no other fashion” (33). (This is not the only place

where Black speaks of the “embodiment” or “incarnation” of meaning in metaphor.)

83. Ridderbos, “Man of Sorrows,” 158. This way of thinking about the Man of Sorrows sounds quite similar to the way Julian of Norwich describes her understanding of the servant in her “example.”

84. Ibid., 178. In his readings of particular instances of the Man of Sorrows, Ridderbos describes the meaning of each iteration of the image as what he calls a “metaphorical statement.” For example: “The message of our image can be expressed as a metaphorical statement: ‘The image of the crucified Christ is the image of the Pantocrator.’ . . . Such an understanding and experiencing has to do with the meanings of both images. The Man of Sorrows is not a combination of the Pantocrator as an image ‘in which all moments are lacking’ and the Crucifixion as an image ‘in which moments of action dominate,’ but rather one of two images in which moments of action are lacking and in which theological concepts have been visualised” (158). Ridderbos derives the latter two quotations about “moments” from Hans Belting’s work on the Man of Sorrows, *Giovanni Bellini—Pietà: Ikone und Bilderzählung in der venezianischen Malerei* (Frankfurt am Main, 1985), 143, quoted in Ridderbos, 151.

85. Ibid., 179.

86. Ibid., 159.

Chapter 5. “He is in the mydde point”: Poetic Deep Structure and the Frameworks of Incarnational Poetics

1. See pp. 8–11, above.

2. See above, p.24.

3. See below, pp. 173–80.

4. See pp. 86–104.

5. Barbara Newman has written provocatively on Langland and Julian together, considering both their use of temporality and their revision processes. She thinks carefully about the *form* of their works. In her view, both texts’ “resistance to formal neatness” defines not only an “aesthetic of process rather than product” but also—and crucially—traces their interest in the intersection between visionary experience and daily life. Her thought productively overlaps with my own. “Redeeming the Time,” 8–9. See also p. 215, n. 4, above, for her argument that, like Langland, Julian wrote three (or more) versions of her text.

6. See, for example, Fideler and Mayer, eds., *Political Thought and the Tudor Commonwealth*; Tye, *Hard Truths*; Hogenson, “Archetypes”; Rosenberg, *A Place for Consciousness*; Wagner-Pacifici, “The Deep Structure of Surrender,” Chapter 5 in *The Art of Surrender*; Fleming, “Deep Structure,” Chapter 2 in *Why Liberals and Conservatives Clash*. This list is representative rather than exhaustive. While such works frequently use “deep structure” only as a vague organizing principle, they occasionally do draw on its origins in linguistics.

7. See pp. 144–50.

8. See also *On Christian Doctrine* 3.24.34 (emphasis added): “The chief thing to be inquired into, therefore, in regard to any expression that we are trying to understand is, whether it is literal or figurative. For when it is ascertained to be figurative, it is easy, by an application of the laws of things which we discussed in the first book, to turn it in every way until we arrive at a true interpretation. . . .”

9. Good stylist that he is, Augustine structures his Latin phrase with a happy aptness missing from my English translation: “*verum verbum*” reinforces its truth value through concordant sound, with only a “b” to distinguish its terms one from another.

10. Burrow, “The Audience of *Piers Plowman*,” 109. Cf. similar language for a different purpose in Newman, “Redeeming the Time,” describing *Piers Plowman* and *A Revelation*: “In fact, all these [structural] divisions impede the flow of revelation so little that both works convey a sense of urgent movement forward coupled, paradoxically, with a meditative wish to circle back and revisit earlier moments. Like eddies whirling counter to the main current, these musings slow the reader’s progress and offset the passage of linear time with a cyclical or spiral motion” (8).

11. Burrow, “The Audience of *Piers Plowman*,” 109. The lines he quotes are as follows (108):

The firste was a ferse freke, fayrere thanne man
thies othirs,

A bolde beryn one a blonke bownne for to ryde,
A hathelle on ane heghe horse with hauke appon honde.

He was balghe in the breste and brode in the scholdirs. (109–12)

man on a horse, intending to
man; tall; hawk
stout; broad

12. E.g., Ashe, “The ‘Short Charter’”; Steiner, *Documentary Culture*, 61–75; Keen, *Charters of Christ*; Gray, *Themes and Images*, 130; Woolf, *English Religious Lyric*, 211.

13. The extant witnesses disagree on the key issue of whether Adam and Eve were driven out of paradise *with* or *without* guilt. While the agent of this treason (an offense against the king) is unclear, it seems probable to me that the poet was thinking of the devil, not Adam (or Eve), as scholars tend to assume and later manuscripts appear to indicate. The best A-text manuscript, BL MS Add. 11307, is consistently more correct than most, particularly with regard to legal terminology and liturgical significance, giving real reason to consider whether its reading of this line (without guilt) might be the true one. If it is, the treasonous party could hardly be Adam. (For Spalding’s reasoning in preferring this manuscript, her witness “G,” see Spalding, xciii–xcvi, esp. xcvi.) To see Adam’s guilt as treasonous is a relatively easy reading, but this poet thinks deeply and imaginatively about his system of imagery; elsewhere he does not take the obvious or easy path. Much of the poem’s careful technical thought is misunderstood and smoothed out in later A-text manuscripts as well as in the Band C-texts. Spalding has shown that even the earliest extant witness is several generations removed from the original exemplar (Spalding, xxxix, civ–cv).

Like Julian in her example of the lord and the servant, Add. 11307 and two other manuscripts see no fault in humanity: “Of all ioye þou were out pult / with treson and wythoute gult” (5–6, emphasis added; MS BL Harley 2346 and MS Add. Bod.C.280 agree with this reading). Moreover, all witnesses consistently refer to the devil as *humanity*’s adversary (“your foe”), never Christ’s: “Wel gret envye hadde þanne þi fo” (26); “Ageyn þi fo ful of wrake” (40); “Man þou hast ouercome þi fon” (188); “To helle I wente þis chartre to shewe / By-fore þi fo sathanas þe shrewe” (189–90); “Thanne þar þe not drede of þi fo” (212). It is further worth noting that the “Long Charter” persistently calls attention to Christ’s *kingship*. Satan’s first clear action—putting Christ to the test—is described as “felonye” (29). It would be worth knowing whether the original of this poem was written before or after the definition of treason entered into the parliamentary record in 1352. In Edward III’s proclamation, killing the king or his first son and heir is considered treason, but riding armed against a countryman in order to kill, rob, or kidnap him in return for ransom—these actions are not treason but felony or trespass. One thing the parliamentary record makes clear is that the legal definition of treason was disputed. See Edw. III, 1352, January, 17.vii, Given-Wilson, *The Parliament Rolls of Medieval England*. On “treason,” see Green, *Crisis of Truth*, 206–47. For Spalding’s view that the line should instead read “with resoun and wythoute gylt,” see Spalding, cvi–cvii.

14. “Forty” is an important number for the poem’s structure, as it is liturgically for Lent and the Easter season. In the “Long Charter,” the gestation in the womb is given as forty weeks less five days (rather than being stated simply as thirty-five days) (l. 19), and the time from Easter Sunday to Ascension Day is forty days (l. 201). The temptation of Christ by the devil, told at ll. 25–33, also lasts forty days; although the number is not mentioned in the poem, it is so well known that the poet would surely expect his readers to make this connection (liturgically, this is Lent).

15. Julian uses the same word (“kirtle”) in her example of the lord and the servant (see pp. 76–79 and 149–54 above). Exegetes interpreted the “seamless garment” Mary wore for Jesus as Christ’s humanity, among other things, basing their thought on John (19:23–24:

The soldiers therefore, when they had crucified him, took his garments (and they made four parts, to every soldier a part), and also his coat. Now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout.

They said then one to another: Let us not cut it, but let us cast lots for it, whose it shall be; that the scripture might be fulfilled, saying: *They have parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture they have cast lot*. And the soldiers indeed did these things.

For other examples of “kirtle” as Christ’s “seamless garment,” see *MED*, s.v. “kirtel (n),” 1d and 3. In exegetical thought, the seamless garment is also an image of charity emphasizing

the integral unity of the Church. The imagery of the seamless garment was reinforced by the apocryphal *Protevangelium of James*, in which Mary is engaged in spinning purple thread to “make a veil for the temple of the Lord” when Gabriel comes for the Annunciation. For the text, see Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, 61. For a history of the seamless garment, see Aubineau, “La Tunique sans couture du Christ.”

16. “loue drynk”: cf. *A Revelation*, chapters 17, 31, 75 and p. 240, n. 7, above; *Piers Plowman* 20.403 ~ B.18.365: “For y þat am lord of lyf, loue is my drynke.”

17. Cf. *Piers Plowman*, “*Liberum dei Arbitrium* for loue hath vndertake / That this iesus of his gentrice [*because of his noble birth*] shal iouste in Pers Armes / In his helm and in his haberion, *humana natura*” (20.20–22 ~ B.18.21–23), and my discussion of “secte” and “sute,” pp. 66–72, above; *A Revelation*, chapter fifty-one, and my pp. 148–51, above. The “Long Charter,” *Piers Plowman*, and *A Revelation* coincide in some of their imagery more intriguingly than is initially apparent.

18. Like “demytted” in line 15 (see p. 260, n. 29) and “streyned” in line 79 (see p. 241, n. 8), the phrase “come and cleyme” is legal language, though its technical nature could easily be missed by non-lawyers. “CLAIMEN To demand (something) by virtue of a right or title; to affirm a right or possession”; “COMEN AND CLAIMEN To come into court and put forth a claim.” Alford, *Piers Plowman: A Glossary of Legal Diction*, 28, 31. “[D] mytted” confused later copyists, as the manuscript witnesses attest (for “demytted”: “ordeyned,” “demede to,” “meked”).

19. Richard Firth Green postulates that the Charter of Christ “may well have originated among the clerical dependents of a great estate, either ecclesiastical or secular, though whether its circulation was restricted to such milieu is far less certain” (*Crisis of Truth*, 261). Spalding does not speculate on an author, beyond locating the language of the postulated original as “Midland” (87). On the poet’s probable background, see also n. 23, below.

20. The poem is deeply invested in the liturgy for the Triduum, as its Latin quotations demonstrate (l. 62a, Holy Thursday; l. 66a, Good Friday; l. 96a, Holy Thursday and Holy Saturday; l. 164a, Holy Thursday). Even where there is no Latin to underline the liturgical connection, the poet’s careful choice of words recalls the liturgical texts (e.g.: ll. 167–68, Good Friday [“ego te potavi aqua salutis de petra: et tu me potasti felle et aceto”]; l. 222, Holy Saturday [“o mors ero mors tua,” Hos. 13:14]). *Liber usualis*, 644, 667, 631, 727, 737, 667, 641, 707–8, 733.

21. Two manuscripts (MS Bod. 89 and MS BL Harl. 5396, Spalding, 24–25) attest “feste” for “soper,” perhaps indicating that some readers desired to reinforce the parallel between the two passages even more strongly (“feste” occurs at ll. 197, 201, 203).

22. Luke 22:19: “[And taking bread, he gave thanks, and brake; and gave to them, saying: This is my body, which is given for you.] Do this in memory of me.” (I have used the translation current in the Roman liturgy rather than the Douay-Rheims’s.)

23. Cf. “soule(s) fode” at *MED*, s.v. “fode (n(1)),” 2a, a figurative sense meaning “Spiritual sustenance, comfort, or support.” I am not convinced that all of the quotations cited under this definition suit it, since the eucharistic ones are not figurative (but not all of these are eucharistic). Given how carefully the poet indicates that the “mete and drynk” are “flesch and blode,” the emphasis seems to be on the material reality of transubstantiation—Christ’s body and blood in the form of bread and wine.

The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 promoted confession as a natural preparation for the reception of communion; the bishops’ resulting educational efforts worked to promulgate this view, so that penance and the Eucharist were frequently both explained together and linked within such explication (Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 84–85). Taken together with the careful exposition of the stages of confession as represented by the true-love plant, this passage’s doctrinally informed treatment of the Eucharist reinforces my view that the poet was familiar with instructional programs that also gave rise to the penitential manuals (see p. 229, n. 14, above).

24. See p. 224, n 48, above.

25. See pp. 95–98, above.

26. Cf. *Pearl*: “bat in þe forme of bred and wyn, / þe preste vus schewez vch a daye,” ll. 1209–10. It would be worth thinking further about the “Long Charter” and *Pearl* together for their treatment of sacrament and charity, especially in light of David Aers’s comments on sacrament and church in *Pearl*. “The Self Mourning: Reflections on *Pearl*,” 72–73.

27. See p. 243, n. 30. Christ repeatedly focuses attention on his open demonstrations of his

power; his actions and demeanor can be read, just as the text on his body can be. E.g., “Wip my chartre here in present / I make heron confirmment / That I haue granted and y-3eue / To þe mankynde with me to leue / In my revme of heuon blisse” (107-11); “I cam of þe holy gost / In playn [open] power þi stat [*estate, station*] to make” (150-51; according to line 149, the fifth seal testifies to this fact); “By-twene to [two] þefes on hy y-py3t / In tokon þat I was man of my3t” (161-62); “Aparty [*openly*] þo men gonne knowe me / That I was man of gret pouste [pouste]” (199-200).

28. Humanity’s poverty: ll. 7, 12, 39, 56, 106; Jesus’ poverty: 48, 56, 70, 74, 175-79. Jesus’ kingship: ll. 1, 9, 11, 103, 111, 116, 117, 151-54, 158, 162, 200; the inheritance: 11, 41, 117, 134, 232.

29. Furnivall, *The Minor Poems of the Vernon MS.*, 462-64.

30. Whitehead, “Middle English Religious Lyrics,” 114.

31. The most thorough discussions of Hilton’s style, including his contextualization of scripture, are Clark and Dorward, 34-35; Mueller, *The Native Tongue and the Word*, 55-67; Sargent, “The Organization of *The Scale of Perfection*” A more theologically oriented study is Kennedy, *Incarnational Element in Hilton’s Spirituality*.

32. For the complicated textual history of *The Scale*, see the sources listed at p. 219, n. 11, above. Although *Scale 1* and 2 were written at different times, here I will consider both books together as a whole, following the authority of Hilton’s statement in 2.1 that *Scale 2* expands on certain matters discussed in *Scale 1*. Nevertheless, *Scale 2* stakes out theological positions that do not everywhere align with *Scale 1*, in part because Hilton appears to have evolved his thought in response to criticisms of *Scale 1* leveled by the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*; moreover, *Scale 2* is directed at a wider, probably at least partly lay, audience, despite its opening lines, which suggest continuity with the project of *Scale 1*:

For as moche as thou coveitest greteli and askest i pur charité for to heere more of an image the whiche y have bfore tymes in partie discried to thee, therfore I wole glaadli with drede falle to thi desire; and helpynge the grace of oure Lord Jhesu Crist, in whom I fullliche truste, y schal opene to thee a litil more of this image. (2.1.3-6)

Whether the anchoress was a real person or a convenient fiction remains open for debate (see Clark and Dorward, 19-20). *Scale 2* surprisingly holds out the promise that the laity, and not just the spiritual elite, might profitably engage in contemplation. Yet, as Clark notes, “It is a little ironic that *Scale 2*, in which ‘contemplation’ is boldly held out as a goal for all Christians, remains more a ‘theologian’s book’ than *Scale 1* and *Mixed Life*, with their eminently straight-forward teaching on vices and virtues and the duties of one’s state in life.” J. P. H. Clark, “Action and Contemplation in Walter Hilton,” 274.

33. Watson, “Et que est huius ydoli materia? Tuipse,” 102. Watson cautions against facilely classifying Hilton as merely conservative and traditional, arguing that “his thinking about the inner life evolved from an energetic body of imagery and ideas that in many respects belongs to the same thought-world as the Lollard radicalism he opposed” (97).

34. Hilton’s use of imagery of light and darkness is more complex than I can show here. For the theological underpinnings, see Minnis, “Affection and Imagination”; J. P. H. Clark, “The ‘Lightsome Darkness’.”

35. Hilton’s use of Psalm 138 here is not entirely original but follows Augustine and Gregory, as Clark points out. “Action and Contemplation,” 263, n. 20.

36. “Redynge of Holi Writ mai thu not wel use, and therefore thee bihoveth more occupye thee in prayer and in meditacioun” (1.15.334-35).

37. I do not mean to imply that Hilton thought first in Latin and then translated that thought into English. Cautioning against unexamined or knee-jerk invocations of “vernacular theology,” Alastair Minnis constructively points out that

English clerics moved easily from Latin into one or other of the vernaculars of fourteenth-century England. Walter Hilton could just as readily have written his *De tolerandis imaginibus* in English or his *Treatise on the Mixed Life* in Latin (though it made practical sense to issue the latter in English, to ensure the widest possible readership among the layfolk who were its target audience). While *The Cloud of Unknowing* makes powerful use of the resources of Middle English, it is a highly elitist text with a learned—and recondite—Latin theological tradition behind it. (*Translations of Authority*, 104-5)

His point is well taken, and I would only want to emphasize further that when a masterful prose stylist such as Hilton thoroughly inhabits more than one language, the results can be particularly beneficial for emergent vernaculars.

38. *Moralia* 19.11.18. See Clark and Dorward, 174, n. 202.

39. Alastair Minnis points to the Pseudo-Dionysian treatment of Jesus as the Light that conveys access to the Father as the source of light (*De caelesti hierarchia*):

The supremely divine ray cannot illuminate us mortals except through sacred veils and shadows, which are disposed for our benefit by divine forethought. For Hilton, the human nature of Christ was the major shadow by which the divine light is mediated to men, and imaginative meditation on “þe schadwe of His manhede” was a major step toward eventual vision of the divinity behind the humanity. (“Affection and Imagination,” 356; see, further, n. 41, below)

40. As Elizabeth Salter has noted, Hilton’s allegorical strategies are similar to Langland’s, particularly with respect to his handling of the pilgrimage metaphor, even though the *Scale* is a very different sort of book, in many ways, from *Piers Plowman*. Salter, *Piers Plowman: An Introduction*, 80, 85–89. J. P. H. Clark points out that “The image of the pilgrim, with its biblical overtones (cf. I Peter 2:11) derives from St Bernard’s seventh sermon for Lent, echoes of which (with other sources too) abound in this section of the *Scale*” (“Lightsome Darkness,” 106).

41. Christ’s manhood is also allegorized as his shadow in the *Ancrene Wisse*; Geoffrey Shepherd points to Gregory’s *Moralia* and Bernard of Clairvaux, noting that the idea was “a development of Lam. 4:20, ultimately.” Shepherd, ed., *Ancrene Wisse: Parts Six and Seven*, 42, n. to 2ff. In the *Ancrene Wisse*, the leaping Bridegroom’s shadow passes over and covers the hills: “His schadewe lanhure ouergeað & wrið ham hwil he leapeð over ham, þet is, sum ilicnesse he leið on ham of his lif on eorðe, as þah hit were his schadewe; ah þe dunes underuð þe troden of him seoluen & schaweð in hare lif hwuch his liflade wes . . .” (Shepherd, 17, ll. 28–33).

42. Yet elsewhere “shadow” comes closer to the type prefigured by an antitype, as in chapter thirty-two, where a particular practice of prayer leads to a momentary experience that prefigures what heaven will be like:

That is to seie, this man schal bi hooli psalmes, clene thoughtes, fervent desires, norische the fier of love in his herte, that it goo not out noo tyme. This reste oure Lord geveth to summe of hise servauntis, as it were for a reward of here traveyle and a shadwe of the love which thei shullen have in the blisse of hevene. (1.32.810–14)

Much as Augustine does in *De Trinitate*, Hilton takes this prefigurement yet further by linking it via the incarnate Christ to the Trinity:

Neveretheles though this be sooth of the endeles merci of God unto thee and to me and al mankynde, we schullen not therfore in trust of this be the more rekles wilfulli in oure lyvyng, but more bisi unto plesse hym, nameli now, syn we aren restorid agen in hope bi this passioung of oure Lord to the dignité and to the blisse whiche we hadden lorn by Adammys synne. And though we myghten nevere geete it here fulli, yit we schulde desire that we myght recovere here lyvand a figure and a likeness of that dignité, that oure soule myght be reformed, as it were in a schadewe, bi grace to the ymage of the Trinité, whiche we hadden bi kynde and aftir schullen have fulli in blisse. For that is the lif that is veri contemplatif, unto bigynne here in that felynge of love and goosteli knowynge of God bi openyng of the goostli iye, whiche schal nevere be loste ne bi taken away, but the same schal be fulfilled othirwise in the blisse of hevene. (1.45.1279–89)

43. On eroticism in *The Scale*, see Stanbury, *The Visual Object of Desire*, 57–58.

44. In the section following this quotation, Hilton includes the common monastic concept of mastication—chewing over of texts—but also the shocking image of the bloody teeth of heretics.

45. Hill, “Mary, the Rose–Bush,” 479–80. Similarly, Susanna Fein has suggested that “The Four Leaves of the Truelove” and “The Dispute Between Mary and the Cross” “are probably

less important to mariological or lyrical traditions than they are significant demonstrations of incantational impulses prevalent, but seemingly underrecognized, in the body of alliterative verse." Fein, "Form and Continuity," 123.

46. See p. 248, n. 57.

47. Greene, *Early English Carols*, no. 175a.

48. Out of context, it might appear that the third springing is the leap into the manger, but the second branch is so clearly the nativity as to preclude this interpretation.

49. Rudd, " 'Sweit Rois . . . Delytsum Lyllie,'" 397. Rudd's focus is different from mine; nevertheless, her line of thought here is pertinent to my project as well, particularly the idea of doing away with a strict boundary between a literal sense and a figurative sense.

50. See, for example, Rapp and Gerrig, "Eponymous Verb Phrases," 618:

The study of sense creation weakens faith in the existence—or necessity—of fully formed "entries" in a mental lexicon

What we are suggesting, in summary, is that the distinction between sense selection and sense creation is both useful and misleading. This distinction is useful because it makes plain that not all—and, perhaps, very few—instances of meaning recovery constitute circumstances in which meanings can be selected ready-made from the mental lexicon. However, this distinction may be misleading, because it suggests that the processes of "selection" and "creation" apply to different categories of words or phrases—for example, ordinary lexical items versus contextual expressions. Our results support the contention that the form of a phrase does not specify what types of processes are required for ultimate understanding: We suggest that "selection" and "creation" operate quite broadly in the full range of instances of comprehension.

While Rapp and Gerrig did not consider novel metaphors of the "God is a leaf" kind, they were prepared to extrapolate from the results of their and other studies to make this claim. See also p. 227, n. 62, above, for corroborating later studies.

51. For the underspecification model, see pp. 51–54, above.

52. Swets et al., "Underspecification of Syntactic Ambiguities," 203.

53. Rapp and Gerrig, "Eponymous Verb Phrases," 618.

54. Quotations of "Truelove" are from Susanna Fein's edition in *Moral Love Songs*. While Israel Gollancz edited this poem as "The Quatrefoil of Love," Fein calls this title "demonstrably wrong" ("Quatrefoil and Quatrefolia," 28), basing her editorial title ("The Four Leaves of the Truelove") instead on Wynkyn de Worde's c. 1510 printing of the poem (for the relevant bibliography, see *Moral Love Songs*, 173–79).

55. Isaiah 11:1: "And there shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse, and a flower shall rise up out of his root."

56. Cf. *A Revelation*: "and whan he was there he reysid up the grit rote out of the depe depenes" (51.303–4); see p. 150, above.

57. Phillips, "The Quatrefoil of Love," 250.

58. Fein, "Form and Continuity," esp. 113–22; see also her introduction to her edition of the poem in *Moral Love Songs*, 161–73.

59. London, BL Add. 31042, fols. 98r–101v. Fein, "Quatrefoil and Quatrefolia," esp. 30–34.

60. The fourfold symmetry of the Trinity and Mary similarly may be seen in an illumination depicting the coronation of Mary as Queen of Heaven in Huntington Library HM 1157, a Flemish book of hours from the late fifteenth century (f. 111v, the Advent Office, described in the library's catalog as "Coronation of the Virgin, who kneels before the Father and the Son, both wearing the same cloak while the Dove hovers between them"; Dutschke, *Guide to Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts in the Huntington Library*, 2:491, also available online through the Digital Scriptorium, <http://sunsite3.berkeley.edu/hehweb/HM1157.html>, accessed August 19, 2011. To be sure, this illumination positions Mary at the bottom of the cruciform design, carefully not elevating her above any person of the Trinity.

61. "Pale," with a pun to "fellow" and a sound cluster that would include "fallen"; Mary is "fellow" to woe because she is part of the "lufe" fellowship and the second leaf has withered and fallen.

62. Pun to "leafed," here perhaps also comparable to the moment of fullness, *plenitudo temporis*.

63. Perhaps with a pun to “white,” making the first leaf “fellow” to the fourth in color and in an even more hopeful spirit. The petals of the true-love flower are greenish-white.

64. See pp. 65–66, above.

65. The medieval Latin poem *Macer Floridus De Viribus Herbarum*, attributed to Odo Magdunensis, exists in a Middle English translation. In the late Middle Ages it may have been thought to derive from a Latin poem by Aemilius Macer (d. 16 b.c.) but the earlier poem, which is now lost, was probably known only by its name, as cited by Ovid and Quintilian. “Flourdelys” is not derived from *Macer Floridus*, a medicinal herbal containing no moralizations nor any mention of Mary or Jesus. Perhaps the “Flourdelys” poet had a different herbal in mind, one also associated with Macer, which did include the lily metaphor. While the poet states that Cato taught Macer (ll. 11–12), such a relationship is not indicated in the Middle English text of *Macer Floridus*. On the history of the Latin text and its vernacular translations, see *A Middle English Translation of Macer Floridus De viribus herbarum*, ed. Frisk, 13–17. On the possibility the author of *Macer Floridus* “may have been a Frenchman who lived near Meung somewhere between 1070 and 1112,” see Flood, “The Medieval Herbal Tradition of Macer Floridus,” 63.

66. Cf. *Piers Plowman* 18.117: “Thenne moued hym moed in magestate dei,” p. 131, above.

67. See p. 234, n. 51, above.

68. *MED*, s.v. “subget (n.)”

69. Cf. “Long Charter”: “To haue & to holden withouten mysse” (112). In “Flourdelys,” this language reinforces the polyvalence of “subject.” The phrase survives even today in the wording of some marriage vows, though to many moderns “to hold” is more likely to suggest a physical embrace than land tenure.

70. Cf. Julian on “geynmakyn”; see p. 48, above.

71. A carol attests to a similarly ambiguous use of the “flowre-de-lice”:

Synge we all, for tyme it is:
Mary hath born the flowre-de-lice.

Greene, *Early English Carols*, no. 48. This issue also arises when the flower is the true-love, as I discussed in Chapter 2:

Ho-so wol seche trwe loue
yn hyr hyt schal be founde.

See p. 228, n. 6, above.

72. Cf. *Piers Plowman* 20.298: “And where he wol is his way.”

73. While “star” is likely correct, the sound cluster of steer/steere/steeresmen suggests “rudder” as a possible reflex.

74. Line 53 is particularly difficult, with “feyntysenes” attested only in this poem. While the *MED* glosses the word as “deceit,” declaring it to be “[f]rom feintise n.,” the governing imagery here is of steadfastness, or cleaving to a rule or a way, and “feyntysenes” seems to be the opposite of that. (*MED*, s.v. “feintisenes (n.)”). I think the derivation from “feintise” is correct, but rather than the *MED*’s first sense (“1.(a) Deceit, hypocrisy; treachery, guile; faithlessness, untruthfulness”), the second is more apt: “2.(a) Lack of spirit or courage; faint-heartedness, flinching from danger, cowardice; (b) lack of energy or will to act; slackness or flagging of will; sluggishness, sloth . . .”

75. John 14:6: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No man cometh to the Father, but by me.”

76. I am indebted to Tony Spearing for this suggestion. Enjambment across stanzas seems more natural when one views the manuscript witnesses, Vernon and Simeon, which do not mark verse paragraphs consistently and do not indent lines to indicate rhyme patterns but present all lines as flush left. In Simeon, no paraph distinguishes the beginning of this verse, an unusual omission.

77. For *witen*, in figural use, the sense “to depart” may imply death. *MED*, s.v. *witen* (v(4)). Or, perhaps, “It was to have firsthand knowledge of the place to which he went.” Compare *Piers Plowman*:

And aftur god aunted hym sulue and ~~ende~~gered

To wyte what he hath soffred in thre sundry places,
Bothe in heuene and in erthe, and now to helle he thenketh
To wyte what al wo is þat woet of alle ioye. (20.231–34 ~ B.18.222–25) *experience; knew*

78. Or, “by blood,” i.e., the Crucifixion.

80. John 20:17: "Jesus saith to her: Do not touch me, for I am not yet ascended to my father."

81. Cf. "Truelove," l. 281, quoted above.

82. Cf. Virgil's last words to Dante (*Purgatorio*, 27.139–42; trans. Hollanders, 606–7):

*libero, dritto e sano è tuo arbitrio,
e fallo fora non fare a suo senno:
per ch'io te sovra te corono e mitri*

Your will is free, upright, and sound.
Not to act as it chooses is unworthy:
over yourself I crown and miter you.

83. Or possibly, “yearned for a long time ago.”

84. The reference is to two angels who inform the apostles that Christ has risen (Acts 1:10-11).

85. Cf. l. 58.

86. MED, s.v. “birde (n.(1)).”

87. Derek Pearsall has compared the poem's alliterative style to that of *Pearl*, calling "Flourdelys" "intellectually sophisticated in a quite new way" (*Old English and Middle English Poetry*, 142).

88. Cf. Gen. 1:1–2: “In the beginning God created heaven, and earth. / And the earth was void and empty, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the spirit of God moved over the waters”; John 1:1–3: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. / The same was in the beginning with God. / All things were made by him: and without him was made nothing that was made.”

89. The “Flourdelys”-poet’s “mon” lacks the self-conscious anxiety Langland’s Will demonstrates over whether or not writing can be defended as a legitimate pastime. In the B-text of *Piers Plowman*, Imaginatif challenges the dreamer for writing poems, and the dreamer appears to acknowledge the validity of the criticism:

“And þow medlest þee with makyngis and
my test go seve bi sauter,

And bidde for hem þat 3yveþ þee breed; for þere are bokes ynowe *pray; give; enough*
 To telle men what dowel is, dobet and dobest boþe,
 And prechours to preuen what it is of many a peire freres.”
 I seiþ wh he seide me soop, and somwhat me to excuse *saw; the truth*
Seide, . . . (B.12.16–21; these lines are not in C)

On this passage, see Middleton, "Narration and the Invention of Experience," 110–19; Schmidt, *Clerkly Maker*, 14–20; Zeeman, *Medieval Discourse of Desire*, 247–49. It is possible that the "mon" is not the "Flourdelys" poet himself but rather "Maacer," the poet's ostensible source who also "her-of made in his Mynde" (11); perhaps the "Flourdelys" poet is intentionally ambiguous, implicating either himself or "Maacer," or indeed both writers, by the phrase.

90. The catalog is as follows (in roughly chronological order):

1. National Library of Wales: (Annunciation) illumination, Llanbeblig Hours (Add MS 17520A), ff. IV-2r (Figure 4)
2. Abingdon, Oxfordshire: painted wooden (Jesse Tree) ceiling, Lady Chapel, St. Helen

(Figure 7)

3. Long Melford, Suffolk: stained glass window, Holy Trinity Church (probably originally part of an Annunciation described in a seventeenth-century account of the church) (Figure 6)
4. Victoria and Albert Museum: carved alabaster (Annunciation with Throne of Grace Trinity) panel (Figure 8)
5. Tong, Shropshire: carved wooden (Annunciation) misericord (master's stall), St. Bartholomew
6. Nottingham: carved (Annunciation) alabaster panel, tomb of John de Tannesley, St. Mary
7. York Minster: stained glass (Annunciation) window ("Bowet" window, probably by John Thornton and his workshop)
8. Oxford: stained glass window, lily crucifixion (with pot), St. Michael at the North Gate (Figure 5)
9. Wellington, Somerset: tracery sculpture on four-light east window, Wellington Parish Church
10. Victoria and Albert Museum: painted wooden (Annunciation) panel
11. Westwood, Wiltshire: stained glass window, lily crucifixion (with pot), Westwood Church
12. South Kilworth, Leicestershire: carved stone (Annunciation), tomb of Richard de Whitenhall, South Kilworth Church
13. Lambeth Palace Library: (Annunciation) illumination, Lewkenor Hours (MS 545), f. 164b
14. Godshill, Isle of Wight: wall painting, lily crucifixion (with pot), All Saints
15. Oxford: stained glass (Annunciation) window, Queen's College
16. West Wittering, Sussex: carved stone (Annunciation), tomb of William Earnley, SS Peter and Paul
17. Kenn, near Exeter: painted wooden (Annunciation with Trinity) screen, St. Andrew possibly a lily crucifixion:
18. Winchester: silver Annunciation with gold lily crucifixion (?), listed in two inventories (from the reign of Henry VIII) of plate given to Winchester College
19. Gresford, Denbighshire, Wales: carved wooden misericord, Annunciation(?) with broken corbel that may have supported a lily crucifix

I have not yet been able to examine all these examples in person. Evidently at South Kilworth and Wellington, the plant cannot positively be identified as a lily.

W. L. Hildburgh's original article on the lily crucifixion is the most comprehensive resource to date, supplemented by his follow-up article: "An Alabaster Table of the Annunciation with the Crucifix"; "Some Further Notes on the Crucifix on the Lily." Reproductions and descriptions may also be found, among other places, in Duggan, "Notes Concerning the 'Lily Crucifixion' in the Llanbeblig Hours" (Llanbeblig); Warner, *Descriptive Catalogue of Illuminated Manuscripts in the Library of C. W. Dyson Perrins*, 59–61 (Llanbeblig); Hulbert, "Conservation of the Fourteenth-Century Ceiling at Saint Helen's Church, Abingdon" (Abingdon); Hulbert, "The Recovery of the Jesse Tree Sequence of Panels" (Abingdon); Preston, "The Fourteenth Century Painted Ceiling at St. Helen's Church, Abingdon" (Abingdon); Borenus, "An English Painted Ceiling of the Late Fourteenth Century" (Abingdon); Woodforde, *The Norwich School of Glass-Painting*, 77, 91–92 (Long Melford); Cheetham, *English Medieval Alabasters*, 167, color plate iv (V&A); Remnant, *A Catalogue of Misericords in Great Britain*, 55–56, plate 1c (Tong), 193–94 (Gresford); Harrison, *The Painted Glass of York*, 87–89, plate facing p. 88 (York; the window has been altered since this picture was taken); Edwards, "Lily-Crucifixions in the Oxford District," 44 (St. Michael at the North Gate); Kemp, "The Annunciation and the Lily Crucifixion" (Wellington and South Kilworth); H. Clifford Smith, "An English Fifteenth-Century Panel" (V&A); Edwards, "The Lily-Crucifixion and Other Medieval Glass at the Church of St. Mary, Westwood, Wiltshire" (Westwood); Crossley, *English Church Monuments*, 126b (West Wittering, drawing); Rushforth, "A Lily-Crucifix and an Unidentified Saint in Kenn Church, Devon" (Kenn); Gunner, "Inventories of Plate, Given to the College of Winchester" (Winchester). My thanks to Suzanne Foster, archivist for Winchester College, for providing me with a scan of the relevant section from a Winchester inventory roll similar to the one Gunner transcribed (21869, a note on the roll indicates 13 Henry VIII), which she tells me is dated to c. 1521. According to the inventory, the lily crucifixion was given to the College by Robert Thurbern (warden between 1413 and 1450). The inventory calls it "two images, that is to say, the Blessed Mary and

Archangel Gabriel and a silver pot gilded with a lily and an image of the Crucifixion.” The College has no other reference to a lily crucifixion among its silver collection; it is not mentioned in the College’s other inventories of a similar date, and none of the College’s medieval silver survives (personal communication, April 28, 2006). Yet Gunner’s inventory cannot be the same as 21869: he does not include the names of donors, but does give the weight of each item (152 ounces, in the case of the lily crucifixion). Although 21869 confirms there were at least two pieces (“they were sold”), it is unclear what sort of objects they were (sculptures? a diptych? the “pot” mentioned in the inventory would seem to be part of the scene, not the main item).

91. Media of known examples:

- 1 carved alabaster panel
- 3 carved alabaster or stone tomb panels
- 1 (or 2) carved wooden misericord(s)
- 2 manuscript illuminations
- 1 painted wooden (Jesse Tree) ceiling
- 2 painted wooden panels or screens
- 1 wall painting
- 5 stained glass windows
- 1 tracery sculpture on a window

now lost: 1 silver and gold Annunciation (sculpture? diptych?)

92. Except for the (very late) Godshill wall painting, the isolated examples are all in notoriously fragile stained glass.

93. The lily crucifixion at St. Helen, Abingdon, occurs within the extraordinary Jesse Tree ceiling (Figure 7); the culmination of the tree in this case quite unusually includes both Joseph and the Annunciation; more commonly, the Virgin holds the infant Jesus on her lap. On the Jesse Tree, see p. 231, n. 20, above.

94. See p. 156, above.

95. This window has been moved to the chantry chapel from its earlier location in the upper lights of the nave. Hildburgh, “Some Further Notes,” 24–25; Woodforde, *Norwich School of Glass-Painting*, 91–92.

Conclusion

Epigraph: Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Bodley 26, f. 202v; no. 12 in Greene, *Early English Carols*, 6 (IMEV 29).

1. In the realm of Passion meditation, Michelle Karnes has recently made a similar point in arguing that intellect, and not just affect, is key to works of the sort exemplified by James of Milan’s *Meditationes vitae Christi* and the pseudo-Bonaventurean *Meditationes vitae Christi* (Chapter 4 of *Imagination, Meditation and Cognition*).

2. D. Vance Smith, “Medieval *Forma*,” 71; Smith’s reading of *Erthe toc of erthe* brilliantly elucidates how poetic form may enact meaning. His characterization of the “work” of the poem as “a kind of *sophisma*, a logical problem that can be resolved, or understood, only by registering how words do not just signify but enact experience” (75) is much in sympathy with my own view.

3. Cf. Smith, “Medieval *Forma*,” 78: “The poem’s apparent simplicity allows us to see clearly, however, how medieval readers and writers read for form in complex ways even against, and within, poems whose forms could seem monolithic.” Smith is speaking of *Erthe toc of erthe*, a poem in which the word “earth” occurs three times on each of four short lines, and conforms uniformly to a single rhyme. For the text of *Erthe toc of erthe*, see p. 251, n. 80, above.

4. Brown, *Religious Lyrics of the Fifteenth Century*, no. 120, p. 187. From MS. Rawlinson B.332, fol. iiv. Brown also prints three versions of the poem ascribed to Bishop Reginald Pecock, from which these lines appear to derive (IMEV 4181; Brown, no. 119):

Witte hath wondir that resoun ne telle kan,
How maidene is modir, and God is man.
Leve thy resoun and bileve in the wondir,

For feith is aboven and reson is undir.

5. *MED*, s.v. “leven (v.(1)).”

6. Cf. Langland’s use of “figuratively,” with his evocation of 1 Cor. 13:4–5 (“non *inflatur*, non est *ambiciosa*”; see pp. 28 and 30, above.

7. Herbert, *The English Poems*, ed. Wilcox, 254.

8. Here, as in “Redemption” and “The Collar,” it is tempting to think carefully about the word “suit” in Langlandian terms. See pp. 66–72, above.

9. “Quiddity” was originally a scholastic term that in its expression of the “thingness” of something was caught up in discussions of the substantial and human nature of Christ himself; consider Aquinas, for example, arguing that the hypostatic union took place in the person [in *persona*], not the nature [*natura*] of Christ:

And since the termination of the generative process within what is generated is the essence of the species as expressed by the definition, that essence is accordingly termed a “nature” [*natura*]; Boethius defines nature on that understanding when he writes, *Nature for each thing is what gives it form through the specific difference*, i.e. the completive of the definition of the species. Here, therefore, we are discussing nature as meaning essence [essentiam], or the “what-it-is” or “whatness” of a species [*vel quod quid est sive quidditatem speciei*]. (*Summa* 3a.2.1; the person part of the proof comes in 3a.2.2)

Herbert’s original title for the poem was simply “Poetry.” Of course, he also plays on *quiddity*’s post-medieval sense as “A subtlety or nicety in argument; a quibble. In later use also: a witticism; a quip” (*OED*, s.v. “quiddity,” 2a).

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